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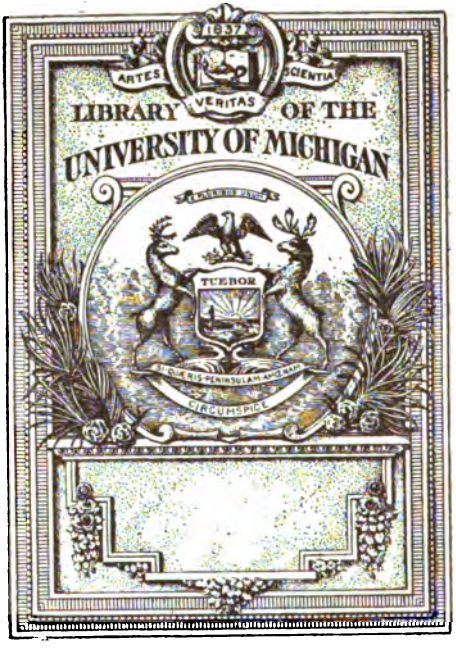

THE GIFT OF
Miss Carrie S. Garwood

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Martha M. Garwood
Monroe, Michigan

THE

NEW AND COMPLETE

LIFE OF OUR

BLESSED LORD AND SAVIOUR,

JESUS CHRIST:

THAT GREAT EXAMPLE

AS WELL AS SAVIOUR OF MANKIND.

CONTAINING

An authentic account of all the real facts relating to his exemplary life, meritorious sufferings, and death.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

The Lives, Transactions, Sufferings and Deaths

OF HIS

HOLY APOSTLES, EVANGELISTS, AND DISCIPLES.

THE WHOLE INTERSPERSED WITH

PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENTS AND USEFUL REMARKS.

BY PAUL WRIGHT, D. D.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

PUBLISHED BY

DANIEL FENTON, MILL-HILL, NEAR TRENTON.

James Oram, Printer.

1810.

Miss Carrie S. Garwood
of
1-20-1928
2 vols.

INTRODUCTORY

PREFACE

TO CHRISTIAN READERS.

IT is a real fact, evident beyond contradiction, that every individual should acquire a thorough knowledge of the Life and Death of our blessed Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST, who was crucified for our sins, rose again for our justification, and now sitteth at the right hand of God, making intercession for us. If Christians seek a noble example of conduct to copy after, we would recommend to them the glorious and benevolent transactions

OF THE GREAT CAPTAIN OF OUR SALVATION;

One, who being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God, yet made himself of no reputation, suffering his divine essence to be clothed with mortality, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; that mankind by the merits of his redemption, through faith, might enjoy everlasting happiness throughout eternity in the realms above. The Life and Death of our Holy REDEEMER with other matters herein contained is a Work, if properly executed, of the utmost consequence to this Christian land, and is the most valuable of all histories; but it is a circumstance which will be readily allowed by the impartial and disinterested, and which has been long much lamented by many, that no complete and perfectly authentic Work of this kind has yet been published, whereby persons of every capacity may gain a thorough knowledge of the important subject. Hitherto, works of this sort have been published in too small a compass,

and likewise in too small sizes, which are by no means so elegant, so convenient, or so well adapted to the importance of so valuable a work, which should not be cut short and mangled to suit any private purpose whatever. Some of these publications have been compiled by persons, whose names, characters, and private sentiments, would have done no honour to a work of the kind, and were therefore ushered into the world under the names of fictitious persons who never existed; and others of them have been so wretchedly executed, that Christian people have only parted with their money, without having their expectations at all answered. To remedy all these defects, by which the public have been long materially injured, I was applied to by my numerous friends to publish this NEW AND COMPLETE LIFE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, the diligent labour of many years, and which, by the blessing of God, I have now commited to the press, in order, that it may be of real benefit and use to pious and sincere Christians of every denomination. It is calculated to convey *divine knowledge* to *all ranks of people*, rectify *errors* which too many are apt to run into, represent *real religion* in its *native colours*, as taught by CHRIST himself, and enable even the most ignorant *Christian* to give an account of the *faith* that is in him, when called upon any occasion. The sacred writings of the Evangelists, &c. have not only been carefully consulted, and the respective accounts systematically arranged, so as to make this work a complete *Harmony of the Gospels*, but prophane *authors* of undoubted *authority*, who were co-temporaries with the *Evangelists* and *Apostles*, have furnished us with a variety of useful particulars relating to our Blessed SAVIOUR, not included in the Scripture History. The evidence which Josephus bears to different parts of our REDEEMER'S LIFE has also been faithfully preserved, together with an account of the *Jewish customs*, *offices*, and *sects;* every other writer (ancient and modern) on the subject, has also been diligently perused; and no trouble or expence spared to render this work, in every

respect, the most complete and perfect of the kind: being happily calculated to convey to the inquisitive mind, a *perfect knowledge* of our *holy religion*, to promote a *firm faith* in the *merits* of our blessed Redeemer, and to recommend the *practice* of every *Christian virtue*. The *Chronological* and *Geographical parts* are likewise minutely attended to, and the errors which others have fallen into, are most carefully avoided. In this Preface, I shall only mention a few things more; and may they be attentively considered by all persons of both sexes, old and young. Let it be your care to make the evidences of Christianity the subject of your serious reflection and converse, wherein such marks of truth and divinity are to be found. The subject of the Life of our Blessed Redeemer, is of the utmost consequence to every one, and demands our most serious regard; for, as the great Apostle says, *Christ hath suffered for us, leaving an example to us, that we might follow his steps:* He declares himself the *Way*, the *Truth*, and the *Life:* He not only *redeems* our *souls* from *death* to *life*, but *enlightens* and *leads* all his faithful *followers* in *the paths* of *safety*, to a happy *eternity*. The answers which I have given to Atheists, Deists, and Infidels in general, I hope will be found of the most satisfactory nature to my numerous readers, and such as will build them up in their most holy faith. The examples of the holy Apostles, Evangelists, Disciples, and other eminent persons and primitive Christians (also given in this work) will likewise afford great instruction to every reader: and the practical improvements and doctrinal remarks, interspersed throughout the whole, will be carefully applied to the faith and duty of every Believer.

PAUL WRIGHT,

Author of the Christian's Complete British Family Bible, &c.

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THE NEW AND COMPLETE

LIFE OF OUR BLESSED LORD AND SAVIOUR,

JESUS CHRIST:

CONTAINING

The most authentic and full account of all the wonderful

TRANSACTIONS, SUFFERINGS, AND DEATH

OF OUR

GLORIOUS REDEEMER:

WITH

THE LIVES, ACTS, AND SUFFERINGS, OF HIS HOLY APOSTLES, EVANGELISTS, DISCIPLES, &c. INCLUDING THE LIVES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, THE VIRGIN MARY AND MANY OTHER EMINENT PERSONS AND PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS, NOT TO BE FOUND IN ANY OTHER WORK OF THIS KIND.

CHAPTER I.

Concerning the State of Religion, &c. in the World in General, and in the Roman Empire and the Jewish Nation in particular, at the Time of our REDEEMER'S *Birth. Including an Account of the various Sects amongst the Jews, and other particulars, by way of Introduction.*

IT is generally acknowledged, by the most learned and judicious chronologers, that the GREAT REDEEMER was born in the four thousandth year after the creation of the world, and four years before the vulgar æra. This mistake is supposed to have arisen from the

low state of learning, when the birth of CHRIST was first fixed as the epocha from which the whole Christian world reckoned their time. This being upwards of five hundred years after the birth of CHRIST, and there being no authentic records, to fix the time with exactness and precision, a mistake of four years was at first made, and hath been ever since continued. The year in which the SAVIOUR of the world was born, was the thirty-third of Herod, king of the Jews, after his taking Jerusalem; and the twenty-sixth of the emperor Augustus, after the victory of Actium; which, concluding the contest between him and Mark Anthony, put him in possession of the whole Roman empire. It was now about seven hundred and fifty years since the building of Rome. The Romans had carried their victorious arms through the surrounding nations, and by their justice, clemency, and moderation risen to the highest pitch of glory and renown: but by the pride, luxury, and frequent quarrels of their great men, the empire was sinking from its ancient greatness; the commonwealth was at an end; and the senate had been forced to submit to a master. Though the state had made a violent struggle for liberty, in the murder of Julius Cæsar, great quarrels succeeded, and the whole empire was subjected to the authority of Augustus. This was a prince of a very amiable disposition: he, by his wise management, put an end to all contention, and governed the empire with such justice, prudence, and moderation, as made him highly esteemed by his subjects. He not only settled the affairs of the state so as to preserve all things quiet at home, but had the like success throughout the remoter parts of the vast empire: for a general peace prevailed through all the world, when our Great Redeemer, the heavenly Prince of peace, was born.

The Jewish nation was at this time groaning under the tyranny of Herod the Great; who, though an old man, declining in his health, and just bordering on the

grave, had so little thought of his latter end, that he reigned with such cruelty and tyranny, as justly rendered him the abhorrence of his subjects. A late writer has asserted, that the Jews were, at this time, grievously oppressed by the Roman power, but as Herod was, for the most part, in favour with the emperor Augustus, and had liberty from him to rule as he pleased, and even, on slight grounds of complaint, to put his own sons, Alexander and Christobolus to death; it must certainly be the oppression of Herod, and not of Augustus (who was a prince of a contrary character) whom the Jews groaned under. Herod was a prince of Idumean descent, whose ancestors had been proselytes to the Jewish religion. He had no right to the regal authority, but was imposed on the Jews by the Roman power, when there was a contest between Hyrcanus and Aristobolus, two brothers of the Asmonian family, for the royal dignity. The Romans took the advantage of this, and Herod was declared king of the Jews by the senate, and three years after, assisted by the Roman arms in the taking Jerusalem: and from that time he reigned over the Jewish nation, in subjection to the Romans, about thirty-five years. Herod was a prince of a martial disposition, but as he knew he had no legal right to the crown, he was guilty of the highest injustice and cruelty to keep possession of that dignity which he had by unlawful means obtained; and never was at rest till he had procured the death of every prince who was related to it. Having thus erected his throne on murder, treachery and all kinds of wickedness, his reign was such as might be expected from such a beginning. For though he rose to great opulence and power; though he was possessed of all that his ambition aspired to, yet he was constantly disturbed by domestic divisions, and troubles of various kinds, which rendered him most deplorably unhappy in the midst of prosperity. Though he was successful in his wars, and constantly augmenting his dominions; though in the sumptuous buildings he erected, and in his grandeur and magnificence, in all

respects, he exceeded his predecessors, Solomon only excepted; yet his reign was one series of plots, jealousies, cruelties, murder, and every thing that is shocking to human nature

The state of religion in the world, at the time of our Redeemer's birth, was such as stood in the greatest need of a teacher sent from God. The various nations around the globe were immersed in the darkness of idolatry and superstition. And though the unity of God, and the immortality of the soul had been taught by Socrates and Plato, yet their sentiments were dark and confused, very little known amongst the vulgar, and very little depended on amongst the more learned. The Jews only retained the worship of the true God. Their temple-worship was the same as established by Solomon; and the law and the prophets were weekly read in their synagogues; but they had, in a great measure, made the moral law void by their traditions, and their temple-worship was much declined from the primitive glory of its institution. The second temple had now stood upwards of four hundred years. It was vastly inferior, in magnificence and grandeur, to that which was built by Solomon. It wanted the ark of the covenant, the Divine Presence, the Urim and Thummim, the holy fire upon the altar, and the spirit of prophecy. It was first profaned and plundered by Antiochus Epiphanus. It had lately been dishonored by the impious boldness of Pompey; and soon after by Crassus, another Roman general, who rapaciously seized those vast treasures which Pompey's piety and modesty had spared. In a few years after came Herod, who having obtained the grant of the kingdom at Rome, besieged and took the city and temple. And though, in order to insinuate himself into the affections of the people, he did all in his power to preserve the temple from being plundered, and a few years after expended vast sums in repairing and beautifying it; yet, as he obtained the regal dignity by the favour of the Romans, he was always careful to

please and oblige them; and accordingly profaned the temple with a golden eagle, which was fixed upon the great porch at the entrance of that fabric, in order to court the favour of the emperor Augustus. This gave great offence to the Jews, who were scrupulously exact in the observance of the minutest rituals, but scandalously careless in the weightier matters of the law: and while, on every trifling occasion, they were ready to cry out, *The Temple of the Lord! The Temple of the Lord!* they had so little regard to the divinity which dwelt within, that they made this holy place a market for trade and merchandize; and filled the sacred apartments with dealers, merchants, money-changers, and usurers. And such were the injustice and extortion they practised in the holy place, it was justly observed, that the house which God had appointed for an house of prayer, they had converted into a den of thieves.

However little religion there was amongst the Jews, they were very forward and open in their profession, and there were several parties amongst them who violently opposed each other. Those who are mentioned in the gospels are the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians and the Samaritans; of each of these it may be proper to give some account. The *Pharisees* were the greatest of all the Jewish sects; and by their pretences to extraordinary purity, and the shew they made in things external, they drew the bulk of the common people after them. They maintained a kind of priestly pride, and solemn stiffness in their deportment, doing every thing in their power to attract the notice, and gain the veneration of the multitude. A trumpet was sounded before them when they gave alms to the poor; they made long prayers at the corners of streets, and in the markets, taking every occasion to exhibit the utmost ostentation of piety and devotion.

But the distinguishing character of the Pharisees, was their zeal for the traditions of the elders, which

they constantly maintained, were of equal authority with the written law, as they were received from God himself by Moses when he was forty days on the mount. These traditions were multiplied to such an enormous number, that they were sufficient to fill twelve folio volumes: and these men pretending to an exact and rigorous observance of the law according to these traditions, would fain have themselves looked upon more holy than others, and therefore separated themselves from those whom they esteemed great sinners and profane persons, and refused to eat or drink with them. They looked with contempt on the common people, and the constant language of their looks and behaviour was, Stand by! Come not near me! I am holier than thou! They were scrupulously exact in the performance of the minutest rituals, and prided themselves in their punctuality in paying tithes of herbs, while they neglected the weightier matters of the law. They presumed so far as proudly to mention their good deeds in their prayers, and proposed them as the grounds of the divine acceptance; though, at the same time, while they maintained the fair outward shew of piety and goodness, they were privately guilty of great and scandalous vices. This sect of the Pharisees, in process of time, swallowed up all the other sects amongst the Jews; and, at present, it is by the traditions of the Pharisees, and not by the law and the prophets, that the Jewish religion is formed.

Joined with the Pharisees in the gospels, are the Scribes and the Lawyers, who were not distinct sects or parties amongst the Jews, but men professing learning, and chiefly followers of the Pharisees in their religion; for the learning of the Jews principally consisting in the knowledge of the Pharisaical traditions, and the interpretation of the scriptures by them, it is no wonder that the twelve folio volumes, above mentioned, found employment for great numbers of these men.

Another noted sect amongst the Jews, at the time of our great Redeemer's birth, was the *Sadducees:* These, at their first separation, differed only from the Pharisees in their refusing to receive the tradition of the elders, and abiding by the written law; but in process of time, they degenerated into an universal scepticism; and like our modern Deists, they neither believed there existed good or evil spirits, or that there would be a resurrection, or a future state. As to the *Herodians*, it is not so precisely known what their distinguishing tenets were; but as their doctrine is called in the gospel, *The leaven of Herod*, and as their party takes its name from that prince, it is to be supposed their particular opinions were derived from him: now as, from his general character and conduct, we may conclude that the doctrine of the Sadducees would be very agreeable to him, as it delivered him from the fears of an hereafter, and as it is well known that as soon as he was securely settled on his throne (having cut off all the heirs of the Asmonian family) he began to introduce Pagan customs amongst the Jews; it is very likely that the Herodians held nearly the same sentiments as the Sadducees, and that they approved the conduct of Herod, in the introduction of the Heathen superstitions.

It is necessary, lastly, to give some account of the *Samaritans:* These people were not of Jewish extraction, but were the offspring of those Heathen nations whom the king of Assyria sent to dwell in the land of Israel, in the room of the ten tribes who were carried away captive. Those people when first planted in the land, were grievously annoyed by lions; and supposing that this misfortune arose from their being ignorant of the worship of the god of the land (for the Heathens supposed that every land had its peculiar deity) they applied to Esarhaddon, the grandson of the king who carried them captive, and he sent them an Israelitish priest, who taught them the worship of God according to the law of Moses. They

now took the God of Israel into the number of their deities, and worshipped him in conjunction with the gods of the nations from whence they came. Hence, when the Jews returned from the Babylonish captivity, and by the permission and assistance of Cyrus king of Persia, were building their temple, the Samaritans, as they in part professed the same religion, proposed an alliance with them, and offered their assistance in carrying on the work. This the Jews abruptly refused, which gave such offence to the Samaritans, that they took all possible pains to obstruct them in the undertaking; and, by corrupting the officers of Cyrus, prevailed so far, that the work was interrupted for a considerable time. After some years, the Jews obtained a fresh decree from Darius, the third Persian king from Cyrus, and the temple was finished and dedicated. But the city of Jerusalem lay in a ruinous condition, and the Jews remained under great contempt and various discouragements, for about sixty years. At the end of this time, Divine Providence appeared for them, and raised them up a friend in the person of Artaxerxes Longimanus, the Ahasuerus of the Scriptures. This prince, having exalted a Jewish young lady, named Esther, to be his queen, was a constant favourer of the Jews; and sent Ezra, a priest of great learning and piety, from the Persian court, to reform the abuses, and settle the disorders that had arisen amongst them. And, in a few years afterwards, by the interest of the queen, he sent his cupbearer Nehemiah, to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and continue and perfect the reformation which Ezra had begun. In the carrying on of this work, the Jews met with great opposition from the Samaritans; and hence there arose a mortal hatred between the two people. The Samaritans, in the contest, were chiefly supported by Sanballat, the governor of Samaria; who having married his daughter to Manasseh, the son of the Jewish high-priest, prevailed so far on Darius Nothus, the successor of Artaxerxes that he obtained from him a grant to build a temple on mount Gerizim,

near Samaria; and to make his son-in-law high-priest thereof. This was accordingly effected, and introduced a change in the Samaritan religion: for whereas they had, till now, only worshipped the God of Israel in conjunction with their deities, they now conformed themselves to the worship of the true God only, according to the law of Moses, which was daily read in their new temple: from this time, the cities of Samaria became places of refuge for those Jews who had been guilty of such crimes as exposed them to punishment, and thither they fled to escape the arm of justice. Hence, in process of time, arose a mongrel people betwixt the Jews and the Samaritans. The quarrel between them and the regular Jews continued, and their hatred to each other remained at its highest pitch. And though John Hyrcanus, the son of Simon Maccabeus, destroyed their temple, yet they continued a separate worship from the Jews. They acknowledged the authority of no other Scripture than the five books of Moses, which they kept in a character peculiar to themselves, said to be the old Hebrew character, which was in use amongst the Jews before the Babylonish captivity. Though they were remarkable for their strictness in the observance of the rules of the law, yet they were more detestable to the Jews than were the Heathen nations. When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, about seventy years after the birth of Christ, when the temple was burnt, and the whole nation dispersed, the Samaritans remained in possession of their country, and there they continue to this day.

Such was the state of religion amongst the Jews at the time of the birth of CHRIST; nor were their morals in any respect superior. Their religion chiefly consisted in externals, and by their traditions, they explained away most of the excellent precepts of the moral law. Their great men were privately guilty of the most scandalous vices; nor can it be supposed that the common people were more regular in their conduct, or that they should escape the general corruption which universally prevailed in the land.

CHAPTER II.

Of the Promises and Predictions, in the various ages of the World, relating to the Dignity, Character, Office and Birth, of our Great and Glorious REDEEMER.

THE great King of the universe, having in his eternal counsels, determined to send his only Son, at an appointed period of time, to accomplish the salvation of lost, undone sinners; was graciously pleased, in the various ages of the world, to give such intimations of this great event, as were consistent with the nature of his moral government, and the designs of his grace: and that his offending creatures might not grope in darkness and distress, without any hope of his mercy, or knowledge of the way in which he would accept his rebellious subjects, and restore them to his favour, he was pleased, as soon as sin had entered into the world, to give our first parents some hope of their restoration; and in passing sentence on the serpent who had seduced them, he declared that the seed of the woman should bruise his head; which, though it could not give them a clear idea of the nature of their deliverance, nor of the glorious person who should accomplish it, yet it might be sufficient to quiet their minds, and inspire them with a distant hope. What further discoveries of the divine will, in the redemption of sinners by the Son of God, were made to the antediluvian patriarchs, are not clearly revealed in the word of God; but from the prophecy of Enoch, recorded by the apostle Jude, it may be concluded, that the world was not ignorant of this great event; for the patriarch, who could so clearly declare, *Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment on all* mankind, cannot be supposed to be totally ignorant of the great person who was to sit in judgment: and the hard speeches which he charges ungodly sinners with speaking against God, may have no indirect re-

ference to the scorn, contempt, and reproach, which our great redeemer suffered from the ungodly and unbelieving Jews. What further discoveries of the Redeemer were made to the patriarch Noah, and his descendants, after the flood, are not to be learned from the volume of inspiration; but there we learn, that Abraham was called from his idolatrous countrymen, by a divine manifestation, learnt the uncorrupted worship of the true God, and informed that in his seed all the families of the world should be blessed. That this patriarch had full expectation of some exalted person, who was to rise out of his family, and that the notion of this prevailed amongst his descendants, are evident from the blessing which Jacob, at his death, pronounces on his son Judah, Gen. xlix. 10. *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, till Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.* The sceptre not departing from Judah, is here a prediction; but the coming of *Shiloh* at an appointed time, is mentioned as a thing already known. There is no mention directly made of our exalted Saviour, amongst the moral precepts of the law; but it is universally allowed, that the various rituals of the Jewish religion were typical of his exalted person, his offices, and the great atonement he made to divine justice, when he made his soul an offering for sin: and Moses could declare to Israel in plain terms, *A prophet shall the Lord thy God raise unto thee from amongst thy brethren like unto me, and it shall come to pass that whosoever shall not hear that prophet, shall be cut off from amongst his people.* During the conquest of Canaan, the anarchy and confusion which succeeded in the time of the Judges, and the reign of Saul, we hear nothing of the Messiah. But the royal prophet David, in his psalms, gives a very lively and spirited account of a full belief in this great descendant of his; and in a language peculiar to himself, describes the glories of his reign, his death, and triumphant resurrection: for having a clear and full view of the Messiah's kingdom and reign, he, in

poetic rapture, could cry out, *Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.* But clearer, and stronger still, our great Redeemer blazes forth in the prophecies of Isaiah, who writes more like an historian than a prophet, and minutely particularizes the great events which attended the birth, life, and death of the Saviour of sinners. Full of prophetic fire, the great Isaiah could cry out, *A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and call his name Immanuel.* And having a clear view of his sufferings and death, he could add, *He was led like a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before her shearers is dumb; so he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and judgment; who shall declare his generation? For the transgression of my people was he smitten. He made his grave with the wicked, and the rich, in his death. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.* The succeeding prophets were very clear and express in their descriptions of the kingdom of the Messiah. The prophet Jeremiah particularly mentions the thirty pieces of silver, for which he was sold; and the prophet Daniel pointed out the particular time when he should make his appearance in the world. *Seventy weeks,* says the angel, *are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city; to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness; to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.* From these plain and frequent declarations of their prophets, the Jews had a full and clear expectation of the coming of the Messiah; and they had an old tradition amongst them, which was generally received, and supposed to come from Elias, that the Messiah should appear in the four thousandth year of the world, which accordingly came to pass. Nor was the expectation of our Redeemer's birth confined only to the Jews; a tradition prevailed amongst the Eastern nations, that a

great king was to be born to the Jews, who would be worthy to be worshipped: which is manifest from the wise men coming to Jerusalem, to enquire after this glorious person, having seen his star in the East, and being desirous not only to see the young king, but to present their offerings before him. Nor must it be omitted, that amongst the oracles of the *Sibyls*, at the time of our Saviour's birth, in such high repute at Rome, are various predictions of the times of the Messiah; and the poet Virgil, who wrote in the beginning of the reign of Augustus, composed his *Pollio*, which contains the predictions of a heavenly child soon to be born, whom he calls the Son of God, and describes his kingdom in a manner which is similar to several sublime passages in the prophet Isaiah, descriptive of the glorious Redeemer of mankind.

CHAPTER III.

The Angel appears to Zacharias in the Temple, and foretells the Birth of John the Baptist, the Forerunner of our Great REDEEMER. *Zacharias doubting, is struck dumb for a Sign. The salutation of the Virgin Mary. Her visit to her Relation Elizabeth, the Wife of Zacharias. The Birth and Circumcision of John the Baptist. Zacharias's mouth is opened; his prophecy.*

THE happy time being near at hand, fixed by the Triune God, for our great Redeemer to make his appearance in the world, called in Scripture, *The fullness of time*, it pleased the Eternal King of heaven and earth, to give notice to mankind, that this exalted person would soon be manifested, and the benefits arising from his mission obtained. God had declared by his prophets, that before his Son appeared in the world, *A messenger should go before his face to prepare his way.* This messenger was further described under the character of the prophet Elijah; and in another place he was called *The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make straight, in the desert, a high way for our God.* In the accomplishment of those prophecies, it was necessary that John the Baptist, the forerunner of our great Redeemer, should first be born; and, accordingly, the Angel Gabriel was sent from heaven to give notice of the birth of this great herald of the Lord of Life.—The persons destined to be parents to this extraordinary man, were Zacharias, a pious priest, and his wife Elizabeth; who were both of the family of Aaron, and blameless in the observance of the law. But, though they had lived from their youth in the married state, they were not blessed with any offspring, and were both so far advanced in years, that according to the course of nature, no issue could be expected from them. The priests that officiated in the temple

of Solomon, were divided into twenty-four courses; every course began its service on the Sabbath-day, and continued all the week. Only four of these courses returned from the Babylonish captivity; the rest were either extinct, or tarried behind. But, that the number of twenty-four might still subsist, each course divided itself into six; the new ones taking upon themselves the names of those who were wanting. Zacharias was of the course of Abia, one of the new ones in this sub-division, and the eighth in the order of the twenty-four. It was the lot of this aged priest to burn incense in the holy place, and while the smoke of the incense ascended, the people according to custom, were praying in the outward court.—As the good priest stood by the altar of incense, the angel appeared in view, all bright and glorious, as a native of the sky. Zacharias, at the sight of the heavenly messenger, was filled with terror and dismay; but the angel, with condescending goodness, thus addressed him: *Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth: for he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall neither drink wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn unto the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.* As Zacharias was one of the pious Jews who waited for the consolation of Israel, doubtless he had often prayed that he might live to see the Messiah come, which was the prayer that the angel assured him was heard; but that his wife Elizabeth should bear a son, who should be the forerunner of the Redeemer of Israel, seemed a thing so extraordinary, and out of the course of nature, that the priest could not believe it, though as-

serted by an angel; and therefore replied to the heavenly messenger: *Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.* The bright commander of the angelic squadrons, seemed displeased that Zacharias should question the truth of his prediction; and therefore proceeded to let him know his dignity, and the high place he occupied in the heavenly world; and the consequential impossibility that he should deceive him. Know, said he, that *I am Gabriel that stand in the Presence of God, and am sent from heaven, to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.* But, as thou hast presumed to call in question the truth of the heavenly message, *thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until these things shall be performed*: for though thou hast not believed my words, they nevertheless are true, *and shall be performed in their season.* The priest, astonished at the vision, stayed longer in the holy place than usual; at which the people, who waited without for his benediction, were much surprised: at last he came to them, but found the prediction of the angel awfully fulfilled; for when, according to the course of his office, he was to bless the people, he could not speak: but signified to them by signs, that he had seen a vision, which was the cause of his dumbness: and, the week of his administration being accomplished, he returned to his house. Soon after this, his wife Elizabeth found herself with child, but made a secret of her conception for the first five months, contenting herself with giving God thanks in private, for his great goodness in taking away the reproach of her barrenness; and revolving in her mind, with wonder and praise, the unsearchable counsels of God, and his great goodness to the children of men.

Six months after this, the angel Gabriel, the same who had appeared to the prophet Daniel, and foretold the very time of our Redeemer's birth, and had lately predicted to Zacharias the birth of his forerunner, was sent from the heavenly regions, to the city of

Nazareth, to an amiable and virtuous virgin, named Mary, supposed to be about fifteen years of age. She was of the house and lineage of David, and was espoused to a good man, supposed to be a widower, and pretty far advanced in years, named Joseph, who was also of the royal line of David. The husband had not taken home his wife, but she remained a virgin at her father's house; and while, as supposed, at her private devotions, the angel appeared to her arrayed in heavenly brightness; and, with a condescending smile, saluted her in terms of the highest respect: *Hail, Mary*, he cried, *thou art highly favoured; the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou amongst women.* The pious maid was not more surprised at the blaze of heavenly glory which shone around her, that at the salutation of the cœlestial messenger, to whom she knew not how to reply. When the angel rejoined, with looks and accents of such kindness, and heavenly goodness, as dissipated every fearful apprehension. *Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favour with God. And behold thou shalt conceive and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name* JESUS: *he shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.* The holy maid, not immediately recollecting that the prophet Isaiah had, in his predictions of the Messiah said, *Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son*: and being conscious of her purity, did not, like Zacharias, require a sign; but modestly inquired how her pregnancy could be effected in her virgin state. *How*, said she, *can this be, seeing I know not a man?* To which the angel, with condescending goodness, replied, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also, that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the son of God.* And though the holy maid had not required a sign, whereby she might be assured of the certainty of an event so wonderful, and contrary to the estab-

lished order of nature, the heavenly guest was pleased to give her this satisfaction: *And behold,* said he, *thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren: for with God nothing shall be impossible.* This reply was accompanied with such a manifestation of the Divine Presence, that it removed every fear, and filled the wondering maid with heavenly gladness, which she had not known before. The expectation of the MESSIAH was general at this time throughout the Jewish nation, and strong were the desires of Judah's daughters for the honor and happiness of being the Mother of the Redeemer of Israel; and the holy maid, it may be expected had ardently wished for this great blessing; so that, with growing joy and exultation, she immediately replied to the bright arch-angel, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.*

Soon after the departure of the angel, the holy virgin, regarding with joy of heart what the heavenly messenger had related concerning her relation and friend, went to the hill country of Judea, to pay a visit to her cousin Elizabeth. It is supposed that Zacharias lived at Hebron, the city of David, before he went to Jerusalem, formerly inhabited by giants, but taken by Joshua; and, when the land was divided, given to the tribe of Judah; which city was about seventy miles from Nazareth. The joy that inspired the blessed virgin, gave her such a flow of spirits, that she lightly tripped over the mountains; and as soon as she arrived at the house of her dear relative, the pious matron was filled with divine illuminations, and so affected at the sound of the maiden's voice, that the evangelist informs us, *the babe leaped in her womb.* And, being filled with heavenly rapture, she addressed the wondering maid in the same language which she had lately heard from the angel. *Blessed art thou amongst women*; to which she added, *and blessed is the fruit of thy womb*; and still continuing full of hea-

venly ardour, she exclaimed, *And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me!* she then proceeded immediately to inform her of her happpy pregnancy, *For*, said she, *as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.* And then, in full assurance of the fulfilment of the divine predictions respecting them both, she added, *And blessed is she that believeth, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.* The divine flame of holy love and joy, which glowed in the heart of the pious matron, soon catched in the bosom of the holy virgin; who, confirmed beyond all possibility of a doubt, in the truth of the angel's prediction, by what she had now heard from her dear relation, proceeded with a heart full of gratitude and holy joy, to bless, and praise, and magnify the name of the Lord, for his great goodness to her, in appointing her to be the mother of the Messiah.

After three months stay with her dear relative, the virgin Mary returned to her own city Nazareth; and being now the fourth month, her pregnancy plainly appeared; which gave great concern to Joseph, her espoused husband. But though he apprehended she had been seduced, yet having a sincere affection for her, and being of a kind and compassionate disposition, he was not willing to proceed to the severity of the law; which in this case was no less than her being stoned to death at the door of her father's house. But as he had just reason to suppose that her honor could not be vindicated, and being a strict observer of the law, he was not willing to take her to his bed; but stood determined to break the marriage contract as privately as possible. While with great vexation and trouble, he was ruminating on these things, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and informed him of the nature of his wife's pregnancy; giving him, at the same time, full satisfaction concerning her innocency. *Fear not*, said the heavenly vision, *Joseph*

thou son of David, to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS, *for he shall save his people from their sins.* It was with unspeakable joy, that the good man received this information; and, not hesitating a moment respecting the truth of the heavenly message, he took the lovely maid home to his house. But the evangelist informs us, that *he knew her not, till she had brought forth her first born Son.*

While these things were in agitation at Nazareth, Elizabeth the wife of Zacharias the priest, and relative of the favoured virgin, having completed the full time of her pregnancy, was delivered of a son. The reproach of her barrenness being thus removed, her neighbours and friends rejoiced with her; the whole family smiled at the event, and every heart was glad. On the eighth day, when they attended on the sacred rite of circumcision, the relations proposed that he should be named Zacharias, after his father; but the mother informed them that his name must be John. All the guests wondered at this, because it was a name never known in the family, and for the decision of the affair, they applied to the father. The good man being dumb since the appearance of the angel who predicted the birth of the child, could not inform them, but made signs for a writing table, and wrote, *His name is John.* The relations wondered at this, but more at observing the old man's dumbness to cease from that moment, whose voice, rising clearer and stronger for having been so long suppressed, raised loud strains of joy and gladness, and lofty praises to the God of Israel, for his great goodness, in remembering and visiting his people; and, full of prophetic rapture, turning to his infant son, *And thou child,* said he, *shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people; by the remission of their sins, through the tender*

mercy of our God; whereby the day spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. Such were the circumstances which attended the birth of the forerunner of our great Redeemer; the report of which soon spread through the hill country of Judea, and various were the conceptions of the people concerning the future greatness of the child. The infant soon grew strong and robust, he was remarkably simple and abstemious in his diet, plain and careless in his dress, and addicted to solitude and contemplation. Sacred history gives us no information what afterwards became of his parents; but there is a tradition that the mother fled into the deserts with her infant son to preserve him from the rage of Herod; and that the father was slain in the outer court of the temple, by the orders of that tyrant; and is that Zacharias which Christ mentions, whose blood was shed between the temple and the altar.

CHAPTER IV.

The Birth of CHRIST, *with all the various Circumstances that attended it,* viz. *An angel bringing the News thereof to the Shepherds; the heavenly Host praise God; the Shepherds, finding it to be as the Angel had said, glorify God; and the Circumcision of* CHRIST.

THE great King of the creation and righteous Governor of the universe, having fixed in his eternal counsels, both the time and the place where his only son was to be born; so ordered the affairs of the world, as to bring his great predictions and gracious designs to pass. And as he over-rules the counsels of princes, and determines the actions of men, so as to answer the wise ends of his government, and accomplish the designs of his grace; so in this present instance, there is a remarkable manifestation of divine wisdom and power co-operating to bring about this great event. The holy Virgin and her husband dwelt at Nazareth; and, according to the prophet's prediction, the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem, which was at a considerable distance: but to bring the great prediction to pass, Divine Providence so ordered it, that about three years before the time of our Redeemer's birth, a decree passed at Rome, by the order of the emperor Augustus, that a survey should be taken, and a register made, of the persons, estates, and wealth, contained in his vast empire. This survey seems not to have been taken with an immediate design of taxation, but rather from views of ambition, or that the emperor might know the number and riches of his subjects; for there were no taxes gathered by the Romans till eleven or twelve years after this, when Archeláus the son of Herod, was deposed for his tyranny and oppression, and Judea reduced into the form of a Roman province; for Herod, and the rest of the tributary kings, received the taxes of their subjects, and

paid such tribute to Rome as was stipulated between them and the emperor. This survey, having been carried through various provinces and kingdoms which were subject to Rome, in the two years past, was now making in Judea; and every family received orders from Herod to repair to their own city, to give an account of their real or personal estates, and there to be registered. Joseph and Mary his wife, being both of the family of David, were obliged, on this occasion, to take a journey to the ancient city of Bethlehem. The evangelists Matthew and Luke have inserted in their Gospels, the genealogy of JESUS CHRIST, in which there is so great a variation, that it is with reason concluded, that Matthew gives us the genealogy of Joseph, and Luke of the virgin Mary; that it may appear they were both of the house and lineage of David; one rising through Solomon, and the other through Nathan, another son of that prince. Though the holy Virgin was great with child, and near the time of her delivery, she could not be excused from this long journey. The town of Bethlehem was crouded on this occasion; every inn, and every house of hospitable entertainment was full; the extraordinary persons who are the subjects of our present attention, made no great appearance in the world, and could not command the best accommodations: and while those, whose superior affluence commanded respect, took up the best apartments of the inns, the mother of the great Messiah was content to lodge in a stable; and there, having acccomplished the full time of her pregnancy, she was delivered of her heavenly son. Some have supposed, that, as she had conceived by the mighty power of God, she brough forth her son without pain, or common assistance. The stable in which our great Redeemer was born, is said to be a cave cut out of a rock; and it is not unlikely that he was born in the night. In this situation the holy virgin, having brought forth her son, wrapped the infant in swaddling clothes, and, having no better accomodations, laid him in a manger. What an amazing instance of

condescension was this! The Son of the Eternal God! The Heir of all things! The Darling of the skies! Who was worshipped by angels, and held in veneration equal with heaven's Great Supreme; to become man; to take human nature upon him in its most helpless and feeble state; to lay aside his starry crown, and all the glories of his heavenly dignity, and become a suckling child! One would have thought, that when the great King of the universe condescended to become man, and appear in this world, that he would have been received by the inhabitants of the earth with tokens of the highest regard; and that every thing great and good, every thing grand and noble, would have been prepared to honour and accommodate the mighty prince. It might have been particularly expected, that the nation which he chose for his residence, that people whom he condescended to make his countrymen, would have received him with the highest acclamations, and warmest tokens of honour and respect. But how contrary to this were the councils of heaven! how opposite to this, the appearance of our great Redeemer! When great princes are born, the city of their birth rings with acclamations, and the illuminated night shines like the day. But when our exalted Redeemer was born, all was silent, all was still. Not the poor peasant, who first draws breath in the homely cottage, steals into the world less unobserved, than did the Son of God. He, in all probability was born in the night, perhaps without light, or by the glimmering of a winking taper. When great princes are born, they are wrapped in fine linen, and adorned with mantles of purples fringed with gold: the floors of their apartments are decorated with splendid carpets, the windows are adorned with noble hangings, and they lie on a bed of state, which shines with crimson and with gold. But our great Redeemer, and Saviour of mankind, the greatest Prince that ever was born into the world, received no honour, no tokens of respect; was received with no demonstrations of joy; had no splendid apartment, no rich decora-

tions: but was brought forth in a stable, without any person to put on the poor habit prepared for him, but his virgin mother, who herself wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger: but though our glorious Redeemer was received, by the inhabitants of the earth, with no tokens of respect, or demonstrations of joy; though he was brought forth in the incommodious limits of a stable, and his companions were the beasts of the field; he was not neglected or disregarded by the bright natives of the heavenly world. A squadron of shining cherubs was dispatched from the eternal throne, to proclaim the great event, to congratulate the wondering world on their great Deliverer's birth, and proclaim the approach of the exalted Prince of peace. But this report was to be made; not to the great Sanhedrim; not to the learned doctors of the law; not to the chief priests and elders: but to a company of poor shepherds, who were watching their flocks by night, in the fields of Bethlehem. The rays of heavenly glory which attended this shining train, breaking through the darkness of night, alarmed and terrified the artless swains. But one of the angels called to them from on high: *Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people: for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you, ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.* No sooner had the angel uttered these words, than the rest of the squadron, who attended him down the skies, appeared; a flood of light illumined the whole concave of heaven, and angels songs were heard on earthly ground. *Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will towards men,* was the strain they sung. And, having ended the celestial concert, they vanished out of sight. Soon as the angelic host was departed, the wondering shepherds repaired to Bethlehem, to seek the heavenly infant, whose birth had in this glorious manner been related. And, as the angels had declared, they found the holy

child, attended only by his virgin mother, and his supposed father Joseph; the babe was wrapped in the meanest clothes, and laid in a manger. These circumstances answering so perfectly to the heavenly declaration, confirmed the affected shepherds, who, with the most ardent joy, adored the holy infant, and related to his wondering parents, what a glorious appearance they had seen, and what great things the angels had related concerning the child. The Shepherds then, with exultation and joy, returned to their flocks, declaring to all men, the great things which they had seen, and praising God for his condescending goodness, in this unexpected manifestation of his great designs, to persons so low and inconsiderable in the world. When the shepherds were departed, the virgin mother of the Lord of life recollected, with adoration and praise, the various concurring testimonies of the divinity of her son; and treasured them up in her heart, with full expectation of having accomplished in him, what had been predicted by the prophets concerning the Redeemer of Israel.

When the eighth day was arrived, since the birth of the holy child, he was circumcised in conformity to the command of the law of Moses; and received the name of JESUS, according to the direction of the angel, who predicted his conception and birth.

CHAPTER V.

CHRIST *presented in the Temple. The Adoration of the Eastern Sages. The Departure of the Holy family into Egypt. The murder of the Innocents. The Death of Herod, and* CHRIST'S *return to Nazareth.*

THE holy Virgin and her pious husband Joseph, having performed all that the law required in the sacred rite of circumcision, and it being necessary, that the heavnly infant should, at the end of forty days, be presented in the temple; it is reasonable to suppose, that they remained at Bethlehem till those days were accomplished; for Jerusalem was but about six miles from Bethlehem, but a much greater distance from Nazareth, the place of their residence. The days of her purification being fulfilled, the virgin mother, according to the rules prescribed by the law, accompanied by her husband, brought her young son to the temple: she waited in the outer court, while the two turtle-doves, which, conformable to her mean condition, she had brought for her offering, were presented by the priest as an oblation to the Lord; she was then admitted into the inner court, where the priest received the blessed infant from his mother's arms, and presented him to the Lord, at the altar of burnt offering; and received the five shekels, which the law exacted of every family, without regard to their circumstances, for the redemption of a first-born son. The God, whom Israel expected then *suddenly came to his temple: and the glory of the latter house was greater than the former.*

While these sacred rites were performing, a pious and venerable old man came into the temple, whose name was Simeon: he had long waited, and earnestly prayed for the redemption of Israel; and it had been revealed to him, by the spirit of God, that before he

died, he should see the exalted Messiah. Accordingly the spirit which now directed his steps to the temple, impressed on his mind a clear and strong conviction, that the infant, now presenting at the altar, was this glorious person. Full of heavenly transport, he took the holy blessed infant in his arms and addressed the throne of that God, who had thus highly favoured him, in such language as this: *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.* It may be supposed, that these words were heard with wonder and joy, by the parents of the holy child: for it must certainly seem strange to them, that the good old man should be acquainted with the great things which concerned the heavenly infant; and they doubtless had reason to wonder how he came by the information: but turning to the virgin mother, he added, *Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel.* In these remarkable words, the venerable old man prophesied the opposition which the gospel of CHRIST should meet with in the world; and shewed that the destruction of many would be the consequence of their final unbelief and disobedience; yet, at the same time, many would rise out of that dreadful condition, into which they were fallen by their sins, by being enabled to believe in the Son of God, and apply to their souls the benefits of his great salvation. The holy prophet proceeded further to inform the mother of our Lord, that her son should be set up as a mark, at which the unbelieving and disobedient should level all the darts of their infernal fury; and that the sorrows that she would feel on that account, would be exceedingly cutting, and painful: *Yea*, said he, *a sword shall pierce through thy own soul, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.* The prophecy was remarkably fulfilled, when the holy Virgin, about thirty-three years after this, stood by the cross, and, in all the bitterness of grief, beheld the suf-

ferings of her expiring son. Various have been the conjectures concerning this good old man Simeon; but who he was, is not decided with any degree of certainty. Some have supposed him to be a priest; others have imagined he was Simeon the Just, a great person who bore an excellent character amongst the Jews; others have concluded him to be the son of Hillel, a famous doctor in the Sanhedrim. But, as the evangelists are silent in these particulars, they must be left without any further inquiry.

The testimony of this great person was confirmed by that of an aged matron, named Anna, whom the evangelist calls a prophetess; and declares, that *she departed not from the temple, but served God, with fastings and prayers, night and day.* The meaning of which is, that she had dedicated herself to the service of God, and constantly attended on his worship in the temple. She had been married in her youth, and lived seven years with her husband: after his death, she continued in a state of widowhood, and was now far advanced in years. She came into the temple, while the aged Simeon held our great Redeemer in his arms; and, filled with heavenly rapture, blessed and praised the Lord for his infinite mercy, in remembering his people; and spake of the heavenly child *to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.* Every thing which the law required concerning the redemption and presenting the holy child, being performed, Joseph and his family returned to Galilee, and dwelt in their own city Nazareth. But, it is supposed that they did not long remain there, but settling their affairs, they soon returned to Bethlehem, and, with the heavenly infant, dwelt there.

While the holy family dwelt at Bethlehem, there came to Jerusalem, a company of eastern philosophers, or wise men. There had been a tradition spread all over the eastern nations, that a great king was to be born to the Jews, who would gain the empire of

the world. This tradition is supposed to have arisen from the Jews, who were scattered throughout the various nations of the East; and Zoroaster, the reformer of the Persian religion, said to be a servant of the prophet Daniel, copied into his book several passages out of the Old Testament, and cannot be supposed to have omitted the famous prophecies concerning the kingdom of the Messiah. At the time of our Redeemer's birth, a remarkable star, or luminous appearance was seen in those countries, which induced the learned men of those times to conclude, that this splendid luminary denoted the birth of that extraordinary person: and so fully were they satisfied that their conclusion was true, that a company of learned men actually came to Jerusalem on this errand. Whether they were princes, priests, or philosophers; how many there were in number; from what country they came, or how many days they arrived at Jerusalem after the birth of CHRIST, are questions which have puzzled the learned in all ages, but have never yet obtained a satisfactory answer. However, it is a certain matter of fact, that, *when Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, in the days of Herod the king, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him.* The appearance of these persons, the report, and the inquiry they made, alarmed and terrified the jealous old tyrant: for though by reason of his years, and ill state of health, he could not expect long to hold the crown; he could not bear the thought of a prince being born that was destined to that high dignity.—And, as it had been his constant practice to murder every one who had a greater right to the crown than himself, he soon concluded, that the young child, when found, should add to the number of those murders he had been guilty of, to rear his throne, and to support it: but he craftily concealed his wicked design, spake to the strangers fair, and summoned the Sanhedrim to answer their enquiry, where the Messi-

ah was to be born. He soon received their answer, and was informed, that Bethlehem in Judea, was the place where CHRIST was to be born: *for thus it was written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.* The gloomy tyrant, satisfied with this reply, sent for the noble strangers; and seeming well pleased with the event, diligently inquired after every circumstance which might throw light on the affair; and sent them to Bethlehem, desiring them, when they had found the child, to return to Jerusalem, and direct him to the place of his abode; and he pretended, that he would wait on him himself, and appoint him such honors as his high dignity required. The wise men received this intelligence with great satisfaction, and gladly set out for Bethlehem; when to their unspeakable joy, they saw, going before them, the same luminous appearance which they had seen in their own country: this glorious star stopped at Bethlehem, and stood directly over the house where the heavenly infant was. Thus directed by divine wisdom and power, they approached the sacred babe with adoration and joy, and having fallen down and worshipped him, they presented their offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But when they departed, they returned not to Jerusalem, but went to their own country another way; for the Lord had warned them in a dream, not to return to Herod with the information he desired.

Here may be observed the particular care of Divine Providence, in the preservation of the holy child; for Herod, who was one of the most crafty tyrants that ever existed, did not act in this case with his usual circumspection. He had no other notion of the Messiah, but that of his setting up a temporal kingdom, and supposed that this child would drive both himself and his family from the throne; and on this account he had resolved to put the infant to death. But is it not

strange that he should not have went himself, or sent some of his officers, or spies along with the wise men, and prevented the escape of his destined prey? The character and conduct of Herod in almost every case, is contrary to this: but the great Governor of the universe, when he pleases can cast confusion on the councils of princes, and preserve the innocent from their wicked designs.

We are not to suppose, that the satisfying the curiosity of these noble strangers, was the only end which Providence had in view, when it directed them, in this extraordinary manner to the place of our Redeemer's birth, and inspired them with such sentiments concerning him. Several great and important ends were answered by this visit; it shewed to succeeding generations, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that there was an expectation, amongst the heathen nations, that a great king would at this time appear amongst the Jews; and it is manifest from hence, that there were prophecies amongst the Gentiles, which inspired them with a constant hope, that some great things would be done for mankind, by this exalted person. And it is to be supposed, that these great men, when they returned to their own country, published abroad through various nations, the tidings of what they had seen: and filling the world with the expectations of the kingdom of the Messiah, prepared the various nations for the reception of his glorious gospel. Thus, while the Jews continued in the blindness of obstinacy and unbelief, vast multitudes of the Heathens received the gospel, rejoiced in the truth, and dwelt under the benign influence of the great Sun of Righteousness. It may further be noted, that the coming of these philosophers to Jerusalem at this time, on such an errand, produced the determination of the Jewish council, that it was the language of the prophets, that Bethlehem was destined by heaven to be the place of our Redeemer's birth. And it may further be observed, that the seasonable presents made

to the holy family, by these beneficent and learned strangers, enabled the good man to support his family in Egypt, where they soon after this were sent by divine direction, to escape the murdering fury of that execrable tyrant Herod.

The wise men being departed to their own country, *the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.* Joseph immediately obeyed the divine command, and, for the greater security set out from Bethlehem in the night: and taking a journey of near two hundred miles, he settled with his family in Egypt, and there he remained till the tyrant was dead.—Herod, in the mean time, having waited for the return of the wise men in vain, and knowing he was hated by the Jews, was so jealous, discontented, and wicked, that he mistrusted every body of plotting against him; and, perhaps, concluding, that the Jews might conceal this child till a proper opportunity should offer for them to bring him forth, was full of rage, and actuated by the most infernal cruelty, sent his soldiers to Bethlehem, and the adjacent country, with orders to kill all the young children that were under two years old. The troops too punctually executed the orders of the detested tyrant; and it is asserted by historians, that fourteen thousand young children fell in this bloody massacre, and Judah's streams were tinged with infant blood. The horrid cruelty of this transaction is such, that it is almost sufficient to stagger our belief. But if we consider the conduct and character of the man, that he was grown old in murder and cruelty; that he reared his throne in blood; that he was guilty of the most horrid murders to support it; and at this very time, was most deplorably miserable by quarrels in his family, and was constantly apprehensive of plots against his life: if we consider that he had no friend he could

trust, but was jealous of all about him, and thought his own sons conspired to poison him; we shall not wonder at any degrees of wickedness, which such a man, in such a situation, might be capable of committing. But this horrid scene, as it might be expected, was soon followed by peculiar and distinguished vengeance, which burst on the impious tyrant, and laid him low in death. In the utmost agonies of mind, and the accutest torments of body, he soon after this expired. He ordered the execution of his own son but five days before his death, and he commanded all the nobility of the Jewish nation to be put to death, as soon as it was known that he had ceased to breathe. But the persons whom he trusted to execute this last order, not being so wicked as himself, the noble prisoners were set at liberty.

This affecting and terrible slaughter of the innocents, is pathetically described by the evangelist, in referring to a passage in the prophet Jeremiah. *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, in Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be conforted, because they were not.*

Some time after the tyrant was dead, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, in Egypt, in a dream, and commanded him to take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; at the same time informing him, that they were dead who sought the young child's life. The good man, without hesitation, obeyed the heavenly vision, and returning to his native country, designed to have settled in Judea, probably at Bethlehem. But when he heard that Archelaus, the son of Herod, succeeded his father in Judea, and he being a prince of a cruel disposition, Joseph judged it imprudent to settle in his dominions; and hearing that Antipas, another of Herod's sons, but more mild and peaceable in his temper, was governor

of Galilee, he, by divine direction, went thither, and took up his abode at Nazareth, the former place of his residence, *that it might be fulfilled*, the evangelists inform us, *which was spoken by the prophet, He shall be called a Nazarene.*

The adversaries of our religion have not neglected to remark, that there is no such prophecy as is here referred to; but very probably, it might be in some prophecy which is not transmitted to us: or, if the very words are not to be found, the thing intended, is the frequent language of the prophets; for, whenever CHRIST is mentioned in the gospels, as called a Nazarene, it is always looked upon as a term of reproach; and how applicable this is to the language of the prophet Isaiah, *He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

CHAPTER VI.

The Infancy of CHRIST *and his disputing with the Doctors in the Temple.*

THE account of our Lord's childhood and youth is very slightly touched on in the sacred writings. How he was employed from his infancy, till he arrived at thirty years of age, is not to be found in any authentic history. This period includes the greatest part of his life, which is absolutely unknown to the Christian world. St. Luke, who is the most particular in his account of our Lord's younger years, only tells us, that *the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.* And, speaking of his life at his father's house at Nazareth, he informs us, *that he was subject to his parents, and that he increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*

But, notwithstanding the silence of the sacred writings, we are not to suppose that the heavenly youth was subject to the common frailties of humanity, the follies of childhood and youth. It may naturally be concluded, from what is above declared, that the holy child was remarkable for a native grandeur and majestic modesty in his deportment; that his temper was the most amiable, not peevish and pettish, but all meekness, kindness, condescension and goodness; and that his mind was peculiarly turned to seriousness and contemplation. It is reasonable to suppose, that he was possessed of the most amazing faculties and powers of mind; a strong retentive memory; a lively imagination; a prodigious understanding; a penetrating judgment; and a remarkable solidity and sedateness, which led him to the most sincere and regular piety, and spiritual exercises of every kind. It is reasonable to suppose, that he spent much time in private retirement, and in divine meditations, and spi-

ritual converse with his heavenly Father; and that he behaved, in every respect, in such a manner to his friends and relations, as made him the most amiable child, in the age in which he lived. It cannot be learned from the evangelists that he had a liberal education; every account we have of the condition of his parents in the world, conspires to prove that they were in low circumstances. Joseph was by trade a carpenter. Jesus abode with his parents till his public ministry commenced, and, no doubt, worked with his supposed father at his trade. He is called in one place in the gospels, the carpenter; and in another, the carpenter's son: so that it may be concluded that he had no other learning than what his parents themselves taught him, and what he might gather at the synagogue by attending to the reading of the law and the prophets. But it may be learned from the words of the evangelist above quoted, that the favour of God towards him was very apparent, and that the holy spirit with which he was filled, appeared in his early youth. The wonderful advances he made in wisdom, the visible strength and steadiness of his mind, and the seriousness of his countenance, beyond whatever was seen before in one so young, were plain vindications of his divinity, and were every day improving and increasing.

It was the general custom of the Jews to take a journey to Jerusalem, and annually attend the feast of the passover. The parents of our Great Redeemer, with their numerous relations and friends, when the holy child was twelve years old, went to the capital of the kingdom on this occasion. Whether the child Jesus had been at Jerusalem before, is not certainly known: it is generally concluded that he had not. Having remained seven days with them, during their attendance at the temple, he separated himself from the company, and, when they set out on their return to their own country, stayed behind. They proceeded on their first day's journey and did not miss him till night, supposing he might be in company with some

of their relations, who had been at the holy city on the same occasion with themselves, and were now returning. But inquiring amongst all their kindred and friends, they learnt that he was not in the company. Full of anxiety and distress, they returned to Jerusalem; and searched every place in the city where he was likely to be found. Two days they sought him in vain. On the third day, they found him in the outer court of the temple, amongst the learned doctors of the law, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

In the outer court of the temple, called the court of the people, were several chambers belonging to the priests; and here the doctors of the law assembled at the feast of the passover, and at other times, to teach the people; and not only expounded the Mosaical institutions, but debated with one another, concerning the difficulties that occurred. Such youth as applied themselves to learning, were permitted to converse with the assembly; and received such instructions as were necessary to enable them to pursue their respective studies. At this assembly of the doctors, Jesus presented himself, and not only gave attention to their debates, and proposed such questions, as naturally arose from the subjects under consideration; but propounded several difficult questions of his own, which, when the doctors could not clear up, he expounded himself, to the satisfaction and surprise of all present. The learned doctors, with the utmost astonishment, heard the young child manifest such wisdom and deep understanding, as not only exceeded men, but such men as were deputed the most learned and judicious amongst them. No doubt there was something remarkably majestic and amiably divine in his appearance; and as he led the discourse himself, we may reasonably suppose, that the question which he debated with the doctors, had reference to some prophecy concerning the Messiah; which he threw such light upon, and explained in such a manner, as raised

the admiration and astonishment of all that heard him. It is certainly very strange, that the admiration which the holy child excited in this public assembly, by his understanding and pertinent answers, did not excite some further inquiry after him. But, it is to be supposed, that the coming of such mean persons as Joseph and Mary, who appeared to be his parents, very much abated the regard which the learned doctors of the law would otherwise have had for so wonderful a child; but things which appear low in the world, are always despised by those lazy inquirers after truth, who seek the praise of man, and are only candidates for popular applause.

Joseph and Mary, who had been seeking the holy child, with the utmost apprehensions and concern, found him in this situation with equal surprise and joy. And there is no doubt, but JESUS, when he perceived the approach of his parents, arose and went with them immediately; taking this occasion to withdraw himself from the admiring assembly. His mother was very much affected with the appearance of her son, and the place and company in which she had found him. She gently asked him, *Why he had left them in this manner?* rather inquiring into the reason of his staying behind, than designing to blame or chide him: for, no doubt, she perceived that he was under divine direction; yet proceeding to inform him, that her husband and herself had been extremely concerned for him, and had sought him three days with the utmost anxiety and grief. The holy child, with the most amiable meekness, informed her, that they need not have wearied themselves with seeking him, nor their minds with anxiety and care, for he was under the protection of his Father, on whose business he had been employed. The expressions which the heavenly child used on this occasion, were not clearly understood by his wondering parents; but his mother, on this, as on every other remarkable occurrence in the life and conduct of her son, took notice of his

words, and treasured them up in her heart: and the child JESUS, having given this early and remarkable instance of his diligence and ready obedience in the work in which he was to be thereafter employed, now proceeded to give an open and manifest instance of his duty to his parents; for he returned with them to Nazareth, and was subject to them as before. Here he remained till he arrived at the age of thirty years, and made wonderful improvements in wisdom and knowledge, being favoured by God in an extraordinary manner, and highly esteemed, reverenced, and loved by all that knew him.

There is nothing expressly recorded in the evangelists, relating to our Lord's life and conversation, from twelve years old, to the time when he entered on his public ministry, which was at the age of thirty; but from several passages of Scripture, various circumstances may be collected. It is plain, from his parents seeking him amongst his relations and acquaintance, when he was left behind at Jerusalem, that he was of a familiar, friendly disposition; that he had no objection to company and conversation, and that he lived in familiarity and friendship with his neighbours and relations; it is also evident, that, though the learned doctors, and the people in the temple, were filled with the highest admiration at the abilities and knowledge of JESUS, when a child; and, though afterwards, he no doubt, gave to his mother and some few particular friends, plain proofs of his heavenly wisdom; yet his conversation with the common people was such, as cast a veil over his divinity; and the general course of his conduct and converse with the common people was such, that no noise was made about him, nor any great things expected from him in the Jewish nation, nor even in his own city. And it is to be supposed, that his mean appearance in the world, not a little contributed to prevent his being remarked and esteemed for those excellent qualities, which must certainly be apparent in him; for we find he was afterwards reproach-

ed in his own city, for pretending to teach them, when they knew the meanness of his extraction, and his illiterate education: *Whence*, they cried, *hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother named Mary, and his brethren James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?*

And it may further be remarked, that the blessed JESUS did not give himself any airs of superiority amongst his brethren and friends; but meekly condescended to attend to the meanest employment, assisting the necessities of his parents with his labour, and not being desirous of popular applause. For as it is to be supposed, that he weekly attended on the reading the law and the prophets in the synagogue, was it not surprising that he could hear the erroneous expositions, which, no doubt were frequently made, and remain silent at Nazareth, after he had disputed with the learned doctors in the temple, and silenced the wise men of Jerusalem? Herein appears the most profound humility, and the most consummate wisdom of our Lord, in concealing his superior knowledge and understanding, when he might have gained the admiration and applause of his townsmen, and have been justly revered and esteemed by all. It is supposed that Joseph did not live till CHRIST began his public ministry, because he is not mentioned in the Gospels, after John began to baptize. Some of the ancient writers have pretended to inform us what was the particular sort of carpentry which Joseph carried on: they say, it was making plows, yokes, and instruments of husbandry for his neighbours. And it is not unlikely, that our Lord lived with his mother, and assisted her in carrying on the trade, after her husband's death: and hence, it is supposed, he is called by St. Mark, *The carpenter, the son of Mary.*

CHAPTER VII.

Of the death of Elizabeth, and the Murder of Zacharias. The preaching of John the Baptist; his office, and Manner of Living: He baptiseth in Jordan, and rebuketh the Pharisees. CHRIST *is baptised, and receiveth a Witness from Heaven. John the Baptist imprisoned and beheaded by Herod, at the instigation of Herodias.*

WE must now pass over, in the history of the life of CHRIST, a period of eighteen years; all the account the evangelists give of our Lord, during this time, is, that he dwelt at Nazareth, and was subject to his parents. But having passed over this time in silence, all the evangelists agree in giving the history of his entrance on his public ministry, and the preparatory preaching of his great forerunner John the Baptist.

When our Lord was about fourteen years of age, the emperor Augustus died, after a reign of about forty years. Great was the grief of the whole empire, at his death, for he was a prince of such a disposition, and reigned with such wisdom, justice, and goodness, as gained him the love of his subjects. He was succeeded by Tiberius, the son of his wife Livia, by a former husband. Tiberius was admitted to a share in the government two or three years before the death of Augustus, and now succeeded without opposition. He was a prince of a disposition vastly different to that of his predecessor, and governed the empire in such a manner, as rendered him justly hated by his subjects. Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, had been deposed from the Government of Judea about three years before the death of Augustus, and that country was reduced into the form of a Roman province. Rufus, who was governor of Judea, when the emperor died, was recalled in the second year of Tiberius, and Valerius Gratus was sent to succeed him. He, having

continued in Judea about eleven years, was recalled, and succeeded by Pontius Pilate, a man of a fierce, irreconcilable spirit, and of a cruel, covetous disposition, too much like his master Tiberius.

Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, was tetrarch of Galilee; which dignity he had enjoyed twenty-eight years. His brother Philip was tetrarch of Iturea; and Lysanias of Abilene. The dignity of the high-priesthood was vested in Caiphas, the son-in-law of Annas, who formerly had held that high office, and now was reverenced by the people as high-priest, and probably assisted his son-in-law in the execution of the sacred duties of the priesthood.

Such was the state of the Jewish nation at the time of the opening of the glorious gospel; for in the first year of the government of Pontius Pilate, *the word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.* The sacred writings have been silent, with regard to the manner in which this extraordinary man passed the former time of his life; but there is an ancient tradition, that Elizabeth, hearing of the terrible slaughter which that execrable tyrant Herod made among the young children at Bethlehem, fled into the wilderness, to secure her child from his murdering cruelty and rage: and there attended him with all the care and tenderness of an affectionate mother. The child was about eighteen months old at the time of her flight, and about forty days after her abode in the desart, she died. His father Zacharias, next time he officiated in the temple, was slain by Herod, because he would not discover the place of his son's retreat. The helpless infant, being thus deprived of all assistance from his parents, the Lord, who had a great work for him to accomplish, had mercy on him; and sent an angel to be his defender and support, till he was able to provide for himself. Whether this tradition is true or false, cannot be ascertained; but it is a certain fact,

asserted by the evangelists, *that he abode in the desert till the day of his shewing unto Israel.*

Some learned men, who have been at great pains in endeavouring to fix the precise time when the prophet John began his public ministry, have fixed it to the month of October, and at the time of the proclamation of a year of jubilee. They say, that his preaching began on the great day of atonement, when the high-priest went into the holy of holies. This was a particular day of penitence, and, it is said in the law, whosoever did not afflict his soul, should be cut off from the people. This day is supposed to answer to our nineteenth of October, and was the day whereon, by the solemn sounding of trumpets, the thirtieth jubilee of the Jews was proclaimed, which was the last they ever saw.

This extraordinary person, in his appearance, and his way of life, very much resembled the ancient prophets, particularly Elijah, to whom he had been compared in prophecy. The coarseness of his clothing, and the hardiness of his fare, were very remarkable: his garment was made of camel's hair, probably the sack-cloth so often mentioned in the sacred writings, to be worn by penitents and mourners; and his food, the wild productions of the wilderness: locusts and wild honey, were his only provisions, and his drink, the clear cold water which bubbled from the mossy spring. In this situation, he began the work of God, and preached in the wilderness of Judea, *Repent! for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.* The remarkable austerity of his life, and the air and appearance of the old prophets, which he assumed, commanded reverence from the people; and his whole demeanor, being so particularly adapted to the doctrine of repentance which he taught, engaged the attention of the public. Nor is it any wonder, that great notice should be taken of so remarkable a person, at a time when the whole nation earnestly expected the appearance

of the Messiah. And as he preached the necessity of repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and had a commission from God, to baptize in water, those who confessed their sins, and adhered to his ministry, great numbers of all ranks, sects, and characters, surrounded him, in the desert, and confessing their unworthiness and sinfulness, were baptized by him in the river Jordan.

John, when he began his ministry, did not come to Jerusalem or the adjacent cities of Judea, but continued about the banks of the noted river Jordan, which, on many accounts, seemed proper to favour the designs of his preachings; for there had been so many wonderful things transacted near this sacred stream, that it naturally prepared the minds of the people to expect something extraordinary. Near the banks of this river it was that the prophet Elijah, who was the type of John the Baptist, was taken in a fiery chariot up to heaven; and what could be more natural, than to see the great person, who was the Elias spoken of by Malachi, discover the spirit and power of that great ancient prophet, near the stream which formerly was divided by the stroke of his mantle.

A circumstance which greatly surprised the Baptist, was the great number of Pharisees, and Sadducees who attended his ministry, and came to his baptism. The Pharisees he knew, pretended to the highest degree of sanctity and holiness of life; and the Sadducees believed there would be no future state of rewards and punishments. It was therefore surprising, that either of these parties should seek after remission of sins, for the former pretended to have no sins that required pardon, and the other nothing to expect after death as the consequence of them. Nor can we suppose that John, when he began his ministry, expected to see the whole nation so much affected with his threatenings as was really the case; for he knew that the common people had a great dependance on God's

covenant with Abraham, and expected to find favour with the supreme Governor and Judge of the universe, on that account: to check their daring presumption, and discourage every hope of divine favour, while they lived ungodly and immoral lives, he addressed them in this alarming language, *O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth fruits therefore worthy of repentance, and begin not to say we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And now the axe is laid unto the root of the tree; every tree therefore, which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire.* The Baptist thus demolished every hope of divine acceptance arising from the covenant of God made with Abraham; and proclaimed to the world, that the glories of his kingdom would shortly be revealed, and a way of acceptance opened, to which a hearty and sincere repentance of sin was a necessary preparative. The awful manner in which this great man pronounced these solemn truths, alarmed and terrified the nation; and a mixt multitude crouded around him, full of anxiety and trouble, inquiring what they should do. In answer to this, he informed them, that an hearty and sincere repentance of their sins, should be accompanied with acts of mercy and benevolence. *He that hath two coats,* said he, *let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.* Amongst the multitudes which surrounded this wonderful man, were numbers of publicans, who were collectors of the Roman taxes. They were, on that account, odious to the Jews, and had rendered themselves more so, by injustice and extortion. As theirs was a particular case they applied to him for particular advice, and his answer was, *Exact no more than that which is appointed you.* Similar to their case, was that of the soldiers; who being men trained up to cruelty, slaughter, and all the terrors of war, and whose pay was so scanty, that they were very apt to plunder for sub-

sistance; they were exceedingly terrified at the awful vengeance denounced by the prophet; and, with the utmost seriousness and concern, inquired of him what they should do; to which he replied, *Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.*

The Baptist commenced his preaching six months before CHRIST was baptized, and vast multitudes resorted to him from Jerusalem, from other parts of Judea, and even from Galilee, deeply affected with his discourses, dreading divine vengeance, and confessing their various vileness, they were baptized by the holy man in the river Jordan. He was now generally known and acknowledged for a prophet, and so universal was his reputation, that we read in the Acts of the Apostles, of some brethren at Ephesus, and Apollus of Alexandria, who had received the baptism of John; which proves, that he was resorted to from foreign countries; and the dawn of the Sun of righteousness was seen beyond the limits of the land of Israel.

Though John received his baptism from heaven, we are left in the dark concerning the name or names in which he baptized: the administration of that ordinance, in the sacred names of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, seems particular to the institution of it, by JESUS CHRIST himself.

This constant and unremitting course of preaching, delivered with holy vehemence, and the utmost force of expression, accompanied with a manifest innocence of life, and a noble zeal in the cause of God, which reproved vice and error, however flattered, or however highly exalted, so far prevailed on the people, that they would willingly have persuaded themselves that John was really the Messiah; for it is very probable, that the vision which Zacharias had seen in the temple, the coming of the Eastern sages to Jeru-

salem, the prophecy of Simeon, the discourses of Anna, the perplexity of Jerusalem, and the cruelty of Herod, were fresh in the minds of the people, and by them applied to the Baptist. They were ready to acknowledge him the Redeemer of Israel; and put the question plainly to him, *Whether he were the Christ?* A deputation of priests and Levites was sent from Jerusalem, to ask him the question in form; to which he abruptly replied, *I am not the Christ.* They then proceeded to enquire whether he were the prophet Elijah; to which he answered, *I am not.* They then enquired whether he were one of the ancient prophets; to which he replied in the negative. Who then art thou, they enquired, and what answer may we give to them that sent us? *What sayest thou of thyself?* To which he replied, *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.* The priests and Levites then enquired, why baptizest thou then, if thou be neither CHRIST, nor Elias, nor one of the ancient prophets? to this the baptist answered, *I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not: he it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoes latchet I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire; whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.*

While John remained at Bethabara, beyond Jordan, our great Redeemer thought proper to leave his retirement at Nazareth, and repairing to his forerunner, who was baptizing in the river, he proposed himself a candidate for his baptism. He, who was perfectly pure and holy, could not stand in need of the baptism of repentance, but being willing to honor the institution, he offered himself to John, proposing to be baptized. John, by a prophetic spirit, knew the *Lamb of God*, acknowledged his superiority and

would have declined the task. *I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me!* cried the holy man. Jesus calmly replied, *Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.* Our great Redeemer did not think proper to explain the case, and lay down the reasons why it was necessary for him to submit to that institution; but, by this reply, gave the Baptist to understand, that the divine will required it to be done; it having a tendency to promote the great end for which they both came into the world. The good man's scruples being removed, the Son of God descended into the stream, and received the sacred rite at the hands of the holy prophet. The exalted Redeemer ascending from the water, kneeled down on the banks of Jordan, and prayed with great fervency to his heavenly Father. As this holy rite was preparatory to his entering on his public ministry, no doubt he prayed for the assistance of the Holy Spirit, in the great work which lay before him. His prayers were heard: a flood of heavenly glory immediately illuminated the whole concave of the sky, and the Eternal Spirit, arrayed in beamy light, whose whiteness exceeded the new fallen snow, appeared in the shape of a dove, hovering over the head of the Saviour of mankind: at the same time, a voice, awful as the thunders of heaven, yet soft and pleasing as the most delightful music, proclaimed to the wondering multitude, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* This manifest testimony from heaven, of the divinity of JESUS, was received with wonder and joy by the Baptist: *For he that sent him to baptize with water, the same had said unto him, upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.* And, confirmed by this appearance and heavenly voice, beyond all possibility of a doubt, he immediately cried out to the astonished beholders, *This is he of whom I spake. He that cometh after me, is preferred before me, for he was before me; and of his fulness have we all received grace for grace:*

for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

John continued baptizing and preaching at Bethabara, near the banks of the river Jordan, at which place Jesus came to him, whom when the prophet saw, he cried out, *Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world;* and on every occasion and opportunity that offered, the holy man pointed out the Redeemer of Israel, and proclaimed him to mankind.

John, after this, continued preaching and baptizing: his discourses were delivered with such freedom and plainness, and at the same time with such energy and spirit, as gave him a commanding influence over the minds of his hearers. Full of the Spirit of God, he regarded not the frowns of the mighty, nor sought the praises of man. With holy boldness, impartial freedom of speech, and the high authority of a teacher sent from God, he reproved the vices and miscarriages of all orders of men. He spared not the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the profanenes of the Sadducees, the extortion of the publicans, the rapine of the soldiers, nor the lewdness and incest of Herod himself. That prince, who was tetrarch of Galilee, had taken to wife a princess, whose name was Herodias; she was daughter of Aristobulus, one of the sons of Herod the Great, by his queen Mariamne. Her father was put to death by the old tyrant, when he was in so much perplexity and distress, on account of the troubles and quarrels in his family. This princess was afterwards married to Herod Philip, tetrarch of Iturea, her father's brother; she had now eloped from her husband, and lived with Herod Antipas. This prince was affected with the powerful plainness, and authoritative simplicity of the preaching of the Baptist, and frequently attended on his ministry. The prophet, as he

spared no vice, nor man who was guilty of it, however esteemed or exalted, warmly expostulated with him on the wickedness and lewdness of his life, and sharply reproved him for his incestuous marriage. The haughty queen was so offended at the boldness of the prophet, that she demanded his death. The king would have complied with her request but was afraid of an insurrection amongst the people; for John was highly esteemed and reverenced by all men: Herod therefore endeavoured to gratify her revenge, by casting the Baptist into prison. Here the holy man remained several months, and his public ministry ceased.

While he was thus in confinement, he heard of the miracles which Jesus daily wrought, and his public ministry and preaching. But our Redeemer not having taken such steps as the Jewish nation expected from the Messiah, (for the prevailing notion was, that this great person, whenever he appeared, would set up a temporal kingdom, and reign over all the earth) the Baptist seemed not to be thoroughly satisfied with his proceeding. His chusing a company of illiterate fishermen, to be his disciples, and avoiding all popularity and applause, seemed not to promise the rising of his kingdom. The good man therefore sent two of his disciples to the Son of God, to inquire into the meaning of these things, not directly, but rather seeming to hesitate whether he were the Messiah or not: *Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?* It happened when these disciples came to our Lord, he was employed in publishing his gospel, healing the sick, casting out devils, and restoring sight to the blind. He did not therefore think fit to return a direct answer to the question of John, but referred him to the works he performed, and the miracles he wrought: *Go and tell John*, said he, *what things you have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them.*

John continued long in prison, and was mortally hated by the incestuous queen: but it was not in the power of the enraged princess to procure his death. At length an opportunity offered, and the prophet fell a victim to her vengeance. Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, with whom she lived in adultery and incest, made a great feast for the celebrating his birthday, to which he invited his courtiers, the chief officers of his army, and the nobles and great men of the country. At this entertainment a young damsel, named Salome, the daughter of the queen Herodias, by her former husband Philip, entertained the noble company, and dignified the royal feast by her skill and graceful dexterity in dancing. This gave so much satisfaction and pleasure to the company, especially to the king, that he promised with an oath, to give her whatever she desired: and assured her, that her request should not be denied, were it for half of his kingdom. The young damsel was not willing to make so important a demand without the advice of her mother. The enraged princess, having now an opportunity to accomplish her revenge on the prophet, to whom she bore a mortal hatred, commanded her daughter to demand the head of John the Baptist. This request the damsel soon presented at the throne. The king, as he little expected such a demand, was very much concerned; yet, as he had given his oath, and was not willing to seem little in the eyes of his guests, he gave immediate orders that John should be beheaded in private, in the castle where he was confined. The orders were immediately executed, and the bloody head of the prophet was brought into the banqueting room, and given to the damsel. She took the cruel present to her mother, who beheld, with much satisfaction, the full gratification of her great revenge. Thus fell this great and illustrious person. His disciples hearing of his death, came to Herod, and begged the body of their master: they buried it in a decent sepulchre, and knowing that John had always esteemed JESUS to be the Messiah, they came and informed him of this mournful event.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRIST, *after his Baptism, is driven by the Spirit into the Wilderness, where he fasteth forty Days; during which time he is tempted of the Devil several ways, but overcometh him in all of them: Afterwards Angels administer unto him.*

OUR blessed Saviour, having been baptized in the river Jordan, and having received the testimony of God, in the most manifest and glorious manner, amidst vast numbers of spectators, declaring him to be the Son of the most High, now prepared to begin his public ministry, and enter upon the great work for which he came into the world.

JORDAN, in which our great Redeemer was baptized, was the most considerable river in the land of Canaan, and ran almost from the northern to the southern boundaries of the Holy Land. It ran a great way through the wilderness of Judea, which was not called a wilderness because it was quite uninhabited, but because it was more wild, uncultivated, and less inhabited than the rest of the country. The river Jordan, like the Nile, overflowed its banks at one season of the year: it was much infested with lions, and other wild beasts, who, being driven out of their dens by the rising of the waters, spread themselves over the country; hence the allusion in the prophet, he comes *like a lion from the swellings of Jordan.*

The exalted Saviour of mankind, when he began his public ministry, did not seek to aggrandize himself, or court the honor or applause of men. It might have beeen expected, that, preceeded by his forerunner the Baptist, and with a blaze of divine glory round his head, he would have went to Jerusalem, the seat of power, and made known himself and his pretensions, to the great men of the kingdom. But

the meek and lowly JESUS, shunning every thing that was grand and noble, retired to the desart. The evangelist Mark informs us, that he was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness: it is not to be supposed, that he was driven by any irresistible power, but by the influence of that Holy Spirit which descended on him at his baptism, and always resided in him. The design of this retirement, no doubt, was, that by solitude, contemplation, and spiritual converse with his heavenly Father, he might prepare himself for the great work which lay before him; and by baffling the temptations of the evil spirit, might triumph over the grand enemy of mankind in our stead, and point out to us the duty of withstanding his temptations. *It behoved him in all things to be like to his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest: for in that he hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.* That part of the wilderness into which the holy JESUS retired, is supposed to be about four miles from the river Jordan, and twenty from Jerusalem. It was in every respect, a dismal and uncomfortable situation, dry, barren, and waste, surrounded by vast craggy mountains, frequented by wild beasts, solitary, dreary and forlorn.

In this dreadful retreat, our great Redeemer remained forty days (the same time which Moses was in the Mount, when he received the law) amidst the howlings of beasts of prey, and the constant temptations of wicked spirits, who, no doubt, used all their arts to interrupt his meditations and disturb his peace. The desert was barren and dry, it produced nothing to eat; nor was there any water to allay the thirst. The Son of God fasted forty days, being supported by divine power; at the end of which time, he felt the calls of nature, and the painful sensations of hunger and thirst. What our Lord suffered from the temptations and delusive arts of the wicked spirits, during his forty days abode in the desert, is not particularly recorded; but it seems at the end of that time, he

was attacked by the prince of apostate angels himself. It is not to be supposed but a spirit, so subtle and vigilant, must be fully acquainted with the late manifestation of divine glory, which had, at Christ's baptism, declared him the Son of God; nor could he be ignorant of the circumstance attending his birth, and the various testimonies of his life. But the great adversary of mankind, though he must certainly be convinced that he was an extraordinary person, seems not to be fully satisfied, that he was the Son of God; and to prove this important point, took this opportunity when he was afflicted with hunger and thirst, to ply him with his temptations. The wily tempter approached the holy JESUS, very likely in human shape, and, knowing the extremity of his hunger, expostulated with him, why he would endure such hardships, when it was in his power so easily to find relief. *If thou be the Son of God*, said he, *command that these stones be made bread*. This temptation, seeming so kind and harmless, was the more dangerous: the crafty fiend designing to allure our great Redeemer to some superfluous acts of his divine power, to supply his present necessity, which might have been contrary to an entire resignation and obedience to the will of his heavenly Father: but our Lord repelled this insinuating temptation, by quoting the words of Moses, which implied, that God, when he pleases, can, by extraordinary means, supply the wants of his creatures, and provide food for the support of the human race. *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*

The crafty fiend, repulsed in his first open attempt on the blessed JESUS, proceeded to a second trial to ensnare our exalted Saviour; in order to which, it is asserted by the evangelist, *that he took him to the holy city, and set him upon the pinnacle of the temple.* Our great Redeemer must be hurried through air to the distance of twenty miles: it is supposed he was set upon some spire on the south side of the temple; probably on that part which was called Herod's tower,

which was built upon the edge of a rock, under which was a valley of prodigious depth. Josephus writes, that he that was on the top of this tower, and looked down to the valley beneath, his head would immediately swim, and grow dizzy! nay, it was farther than his very eyes could reach the bottom. At this giddy height, the crafty tempter saw the blessed JESUS, and thus addressed him: *If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.* Thus, by a partial and mutilated quotation from the Psalms, the great adversary of mankind attempted to draw aside and overcome their only Saviour; the words, *to keep thee in all thy ways*, were not to the artful tempter's purpose, and therefore were craftily omitted. The tendency of this temptation seems to be the exciting our Lord to presume too much upon the divine protection, in his present state of humility and submission; and as he depended on the word of God, when he was in danger of being famished in the wilderness, the tempter quoted the same word to assure him, that God would send his angels to preserve him, though he should leap from that stupendous height. And, perhaps, the malicious fiend might secretly hope, that, if the Lord could be prevailed upon to make the experiment, he would be dashed to pieces with the fall, and all the apprehensions of the infernal powers, on his account, would then have been at an end. But the blessed JESUS was not thus to be overcome: he stood fixed on the immoveable basis of humility and meekness, and replied to the insinuating tempter, in the words of Moses, *It is written again*, said he, *thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.* By which we are to learn, that it is not lawful to try the goodness of God, or the reality of his paternal care in our preservation, by putting ourselves into unnecessary danger, or making wild and extravagant experiments of his protection.

The grand adversary of mankind, though twice repulsed with shame, yet scorned to give up the contest; but rallying all his powers of deception, stood prepared to make one more bold effort. The evangelist informs us, that from the pinnacle of the temple, the devil took our Lord *to the top of an exceeding high mountain, and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.* The crafty deceiver here thought to work upon our Saviour's ambition; and, doubtless, by the powers of bold enchantment, he filled the wide-stretched landscape with vast palaces, cities, temples, towers, fleets, and armies, chariots, warriors, foaming steeds, and all the mighty powers of sovereign greatness: which pointing in order to our Redeemer's view, *all these things*, said he, *will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* To this boldness and blasphemy, the holy JESUS gave a sharper rebuke than he had done to the other temptations, and plainly manifesting his divinity, while he assumed a commanding authority, worthy the Son of God, *Get thee hence, Satan*, he cried, *for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

The frighted fiend now could stand no longer; he had received such a defeat, as convinced him that all further attempts were vain: his eyes were dazzled with the divine glory which shone around the Son of God; and it may be supposed that he fled murmuring to his subject fiends, complaining of his sad defeat, and giving them instructions, to use all their infernal arts, to influence the minds of men, fill them with rage against their only Saviour, and prevent their believing in him, and receiving his glorious gospel.

The grand deceiver, thus defeated, and fled, a squadron of bright cherubs descended from the heavenly world, congratulating the exalted Saviour of mankind on his victory, and administering to his necessities, such supplies from the celestial regions, as enabled him to pursue the great work which he was now to enter upon.

CHAPTER IX.

CHRIST *begins his Public Ministry. His first miracle at Cana. He goes to Jerusalem, at the Passover; performs several Miracles; clears the Temple of the Traders; and holds a conference with Nicodemus.*

IT was during the retreat of our great Redeemer into the desert, and his abode there, that the Jewish Sanhedrim sent the deputation of priests and Levites to John the Baptist, as before related; and he having openly and honestly informed them, that he was not the Messiah, they returned to Jerusalem.

The next day after their departure, the Son of God, having defeated the cunning, and disappointed the wiles of the great enemy of mankind, returned from the wilderness, after an abode there of forty days, and came to Bethabara, where John was baptising. The holy Baptist, knowing that the great design of his coming into the world, was to prepare the way for, and lead the people to the Messiah; no sooner saw the exalted Saviour of mankind, than he pointed him out to the people as the object of their highest regard and reverence: *Behold*, he cried, *the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!* And that it might not be supposed, that he declared him to be such a dignified person, without sufficient grounds, he proceeded to inform the attentive multitude, that he had received a full assurance of this truth at the time when he baptized him, by the appearance of the Holy Spirit, in the shape of a dove, visibly resting on his head, *John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending lik a dove, and it abode upon him, and I knew him not; but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost; and I saw and bare record, that this is the Son of God.* After this

public declaration of his great forerunner JESUS departed; but returning the next day to the banks of Jordan, the Baptist being there with two of his disciples, he no sooner beheld the holy JESUS, than he repeated and confirmed his former declaration, which was made to the multitude, *Behold the Lamb of God.* It is probable these disciples were absent when JESUS was baptized, and the Spirit descended on him, while a voice from heaven declared him the Son of God. This plain and positive declaration of their master, excited their curiosity, and filled them with a strong desire to be further informed. To this end, they followed JESUS, no doubt desiring to be acquainted with this extraordinary person. Our great Redeemer, knowing their intentions, turned towards them, and, with that condescending kindness and complacency so natural to him, took them with him to his house. We are informed, by the evangelist John, that one of these disciples was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter; the name of the other is not mentioned, some suppose it was the evangelist himself. They by this invitation, gained an opportunity of conversing with the Saviour of mankind, and that conversation, joined with the declaration of their master, the Baptist, fully convinced them of the truth of his mission, and they esteemed and reverenced him as the great Messiah, the long-expected Redeemer of Israel.

Soon after this, Andrew found his brother Peter, and with the utmost joy and elevation of heart, brought him to JESUS. The Lord immediately called him by his name, and informed him, that he should hereafter be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, a stone, or rock. The day following, Philip, an inhabitant of the town of Bethsaida, was so happy as to come in company with the great Redeemer; JESUS commanded him to follow him, which that disciple immediately obeyed: perhaps he might not be unacquainted with the character of the Son of God; or if he was, the call of the great Saviour of sinners was accompanied

with such manifestations of divine power, that he gladly obeyed.

Soon after this, Philip came in company with Nathaniel, an inhabitant of the town of Cana in Galilee: Nathaniel is thought by some to be the same person who was afterwards called Bartholomew.—Philip told him that they had found the Messiah, that great person foretold by Moses and the prophets; and that his name was JESUS *of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.* Nathaniel well knew that, according to the ancient prophecies, the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem: and that he was to belong to the family of David; and as Nazareth was a very low and vulgar place, he could not believe that so exalted a person should dwell in such a contemptible city, and expressed his surprise, by inquiring, *can any good thing come out of Nazareth!* In answer to this, Philip referred him to the person he had mentioned, and desired him to go with him, and see whether what he had reported was not evident from the plain marks of his superior greatness and divinity which appeared in this extraordinary man. Nathaniel, however nean and despicable his opinion of Nazareth might be, would not give way to his prejudice so much, as to be prevented from embracing so happy an opportunity, and therefore accompanied by Philip, went to visit the Saviour of Israel. His ingenious and candid disposition, would not permit him to reject the pretentions of JESUS without examination and trial; and, being introduced by his friend, and presented to the Lord, the stranger immediately heard his heavenly lips pronounce this honorable character, applied by our great Redeemer to Nathaniel; *Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.* The good man was very much surprised to hear a person he had never seen before, address him in this manner, and for his satisfaction in this mysterious point, inquired of our Redeemer, how he came to know him so well, as to be able to give such a description of his character? JESUS, with a conde-

scending smile replied, that, before Philip called him, he saw him under the fig-tree. It is reasonable to suppose, that Nathaniel had been under the fig-tree, at his private devotions; and doubtless, had expressed such sentiments, in the effusions of his pious heart, as entitled him to the noble character which our Redeemer had given him; and it is plain that he perceived, from CHRIST's answer to his inquiry, that he knew what was done, where he was not present, and was fully acquainted with the thoughts of the heart; therefore, with the fullest conviction of mind, and the utmost surprise and joy, he cried out, *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.* Our Redeemer, approving his faith, proceeded to inform him, that he should hereafter see fuller and clearer proofs of his divinity; *Because I said, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these. I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.*

Our Lord having thus given manifest proofs of his divinity, and called five disciples, was the third day after, with his mother and them, invited to a marriage feast at Cana, a small town, not far distant from Nazareth. His mother, it may reasonably be supposed, was either a relation, or intimate friend, of the married pair; and it happened, at the supper, that they were scarce of wine: she had often, no doubt, been witness of the supernatural power that attended her son, and as she would willingly have every thing so conducted, that there might be no reproach fall on her new-married friends, she applied to him, perhaps, expecting that he would work a miracle for their supply. JESUS, upon receiving the information from his mother, replied, with a kind of gentle rebuke, *Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come:* intimating by this, that the time for his working miracles in Galilee was not yet approached, but his business lay in other parts of the kingdom.

His mother does not seem by this reply, to have given up her hopes of his doing something for her friends in this necessity; and, therefore, she ordered the servants punctually to perform whatever he commanded: nor was she mistaken in her supposition; for our Lord kindly condescended, by his miraculous power, to relieve his friends, and to convince his new disciples of the divinity of their master. He ordered the servants to fill six water-pots, each containing about twenty gallons, with water; the servants obeyed, and filled them up to the brim. The whole, in a moment, was changed into the most excellent wine; *Bear*, said our exalted Redeemer, *to the governor of the feast:* the governor, ignorant of the miracle, and highly pleased with the delicious flavour and richness of the wine, which was much superior to what they had drank before, applied to the bridegroom, and, in the hearing of the company, informed him, that he had acted contrary to the common custom of feasts. *Every man at the beginning*, said he, *doth set forth good wine; and, when men have well drank, than that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now.* The bridegroom, doubtless, was much surprised at this account, and upon inquiry, found that this excellent wine was produced by JESUS, in a miraculous manner. This miracle was the first which our blessed Saviour performed; by it he honored the institution of marriage, convinced his disciples that he, in reality, was the Son of God, and the Saviour of Israel, and spread his fame over all the country around.

It must be acknowledged, that the enemies of our religion, who diligently watch for every opportunity to cast contempt on the great Author of it, have presumed to censure and ridicule this first miracle of our Lord. They represent the affair, as though the evangelist had reported our Saviour to have miraculously produced this wine, after the company had plentifully drank, and hence would insinuate, that he was a friend to drunkenness. They might, however,

have spared their mirth, if they had considered that the words of the governor of the feast, before quoted, do not imply that any of the company were intoxicated, but only that it was the custom at such feasts, to bring the best wine first. Besides, our self-conceited and impudent cavillers, might have given themselves time to consider, that, though the Jewish marriage-feasts lasted seven days, our Lord did not order all this wine, which he miraculously produced, to be drank at that solemnity; nor is there one circumstance in the account of this feast, which gives the least intimation that any of the company were intoxicated; and it must be supposed, that, when they had discovered the miracle, they would have so much reverence for the divinity of the person of our Lord, as would prevent them from making such bad use of his wine, especially in his presence. Nor can it be inferred, from the quantity of wine which our Lord thus miraculously produced, that he would connive at intemperance, and furnish the means of excess: it rather ought to be concluded, that, by this miracle, he intended to make a seasonable and valuable present to his friends, which might serve for their use, when the solemnity of the feast was over. And, it may further be observed, that by converting so large a quantity of water into wine, our Lord prevented all objections that might have been raised against the miracle being true; for a small quantity of wine might have been easily procured to carry on the deception, when so large a quantity could not: so that, if it be admitted that these water-pots were ever so large, there can be no objection raised against the design of the miracle; nor can it be charged with giving indulgence to intemperance, any more than the plenty which the all-bountiful Creator showers upon the vineyard and the field: so that, notwithstanding the objections and cavils which may arise from false wisdom, this first miracle of our Lord appears to be, in every respect worthy of God, and beneficial to man.

The passover, an annual feast of the Jews, kept in commemoration of their preservation, when the Egyptian first-born were slain by a stroke from heaven, being at hand, and our Lord designing to be present at the feast, he departed from Cana, and taking Capernaum in his way, he went to Jerusalem. He no sooner arrived at the chief city of the Jews, but he went to the temple, and probably it being the eve of the feast, he found the sacred apartments full of traders, money-changers, and merchants, who sold such things as would be wanted at the ensuing festival. The holy JESUS was filled with indignation, to see the holy place thus prophaned; and immediately applied himself to correct the abuse: accordingly, he made a small whip, or scourge, and assuming the air and fervency of the ancient prophets, he drove this mercenary train out of the temple; awed by his majestic all-commanding appearance, they ran before him in a tumult: the oxen and sheep affrighted, fled, and the owners after them, overthrowing the tables of the money-changers, and pouring out their money upon the ground, none daring to make resistance: the sellers of doves he also urged to depart, commanding them all for the future, to take care how they made the temple of God an house of merchandize. The Jews perceiving a promiscuous throng of people and cattle driving out of the temple in the utmost astonishment and terror, and afterwards finding that JESUS had put them all into this hurry and confusion, by commanding them to depart from the temple, and had drove them before him; they probably summoned a council, and demanded of him in form, by what authority he did this; at the same time, requiring him to give them a sign, which should prove that he did it by a divine commission. Our Lord, on this occasion, only referred them to the miracle of his own resurrection, *Destroy*, said he, *this body, and I will raise it up in three days*. The rulers of the Jews, mistaking his meaning, concluded his words had reference to the noble and magnificent temple built by Herod, and

were very much surprised at the assertion; *Forty and six years*, said they, *was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?* But though this answer of our Lord confounded the great men amongst the Jews; the disciples of JESUS remembered a passage in the Psalms, which was clearly applicable to this part of our Redeemer's conduct, *The zeal of thine house has eaten me up.* And as this prediction of our Lord was delivered in the style of the ancient prophets, whose prophecies were sometimes not understood till they were fulfilled; this saying of their master came fresh into their minds, after his resurrection and confirmed them in their belief of the truth.

Though the blessed JESUS refused to work any miracles in the presence of the rulers of the Jews, and strove not to make himself known to the great and mighty in Jerusalem; yet, at this time, he wrought several wonderful works amongst the common people, and, by exerting the mighty power invested in him, confirmed the truth of the doctrines he taught, and proved that he was a teacher sent from God, and that great person so long expected to be the Redeemer of Israel.

Our Lord continued performing several wonders amongst the common people, during the time of the passover, and many of them believed on him; for they were fully convinced of his divine mission, by the miracles which they saw him perform. But JESUS knowing the secrets of men's hearts, and not wanting any information concerning them, he was able to form a just conception of the nature of this belief; and knew how unlikely it was to stand the day of trial, on account of the weakness and fickleness of mankind. In consequence of this knowledge, he did not think it proper to run the hazard of the inconstancy of the multitude, or trust himself too much in their hands: for this reason, he avoided conversing too freely with them, or making more full and clear discoveries of his

divinity, and the end of his coming into the world; for he knew how likely it was, that great numbers should desert his cause, when he came to be publicly opposed to the great Sanhedrim, by the Scribes and Pharisees, the chief priests and elders, and all the great men of the nation.

But the wonder and astonishment excited by the miracles which JESUS had performed, were not confined to the common people: the wide spreading report had reached the ears of Nicodemus, a man of great eminence amongst the Jews; he was one of the great Sanhedrim, and in great honour and esteem at Jerusalem. He had heard the account of the miracles which JESUS had wrought, and he believed it, and being a person of an ingenious, inquisitive mind, he wanted to be further informed.

It is to be supposed, that he was not ignorant of the general expectation of the Jewish kingdom, respecting the appearance of the Messiah: and he ardently wished to see the accomplishment of the ancient prophecies, in the appearance of that great person. And, as the general opinion was, that the Messiah, when he came, would set up a temporal kingdom, and exalt the Jewish nation over all the kingdoms on the earth, it is to be supposed that the great men amongst the Jews, as well as the common people, strongly desired the approach of this happy event.

Nicodemus was convinced by the miracles which JESUS performed, so wonderful in their nature, so salutary in their effects, so worthy the character of the Son of God, so kind and advantageous to man, so happily adapted to the confirmation of the doctrines he taught, so perfectly agreeable to the attributes of God, and conformable to the predictions of the ancient prophets concerning the Messiah, that these mighty works must proceed from a divine original, and that no power less than Omnipotence could pro-

duce them. But very likely some considerable scruples might arise in the mind of this ruler in Israel, when he considered the obscurity of the birth, and the meanness of the appearance of the person who performed these wonderful works. This, in every respect, being so contrary to that magnificence and grandeur in which the Jewish nation expected the Messiah, to appear, might cause great scruples to arise in the mind of Nicodemus, and fill his soul with perplexity and doubt: but he being a person of judgment and discernment, as well as probity and honour, would not suffer his prejudices to prevent him from fairly and impartially inquiring after truth, in an affair of such importance, and therefore determined to have an interview with JESUS himself. He did not think it advisable to wait on our Lord in public; for he thought he might be reproached by the rulers and great men amongst the Jews, and therefore concluded to make this visit in private; and that it might be the more so, he chose to make it in the night.

He accosted our Redeemer with a confession of his conviction of the truth and reality of the miracles he had performed; and that they could not be produced by inchantment, or any infernal assistance; but the nature of them proved them to be produced by the mighty power of God, and confirmed the doctrines JESUS taught to be divine: *Rabbi*, said he, *we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do those miracles that thou dost, except God be with him.* It does not by this salutation appear, that Nicodemus was convinced that JESUS was the Messiah; that was the point which he wanted to be more fully demonstrated, and hoped, by this interview, to receive some satisfaction concerning it. Our Lord did not think proper to satisfy the scruples of this ruler of Israel concerning this, but took the opportunity to instruct him in a matter of greater importance, and lead him into an acquaintance with the nature of his religion: in order to this, he began with introducing the first great doc-

trine of the gospel, respecting its operations on the mind of man; *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* Our Saviour, by these remarkable words, may be supposed to inform the ruler of Israel, that though the lustre of his miracles had forced him to acknowledge, that he had received his commission from on high, yet he could not discern, that he really was the Messiah, nor understand the spiritual nature of his kingdom, without the operation of a supernatural power, which must produce such a change in his soul, as might fitly be described by being born again. Nicodemus, being an utter stranger to this doctrine, and thinking our Lord's words had no figurative allusion, but had reference to a natural birth, was very much surprised at the assertion; for he could not imagine that the seed of Abraham stood in need of any second birth, to render them the children of God, and the heirs of his kingdom; and therefore hastily and earnestly inquired, *How can a man be born when he is old; can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?* Our Lord then proceeded to inform him, that his words had not a natural, but a spiritual meaning, *Except a man be born of water and the Spirit,* said he, *he cannot see the kingdom of God.* Nicodemus might learn, from these words, that his apprehensions were gross and wide from the purpose; for if it were possible for a man to be born a second time of his earthly parent, he would not thereby become so holy and pure, as would render him fit for the kingdom of God; but the birth our Redeemer had reference to, was of a spiritual nature, which, by producing that faith which has a lively and powerful influence on the heart and life, might prepare the possessors of it for the divine acceptance: *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.* Whatever is born of woman, partakes of the imperfections and sinfulness of human nature; but that which is born of the Spirit, is pure and holy, and prevails over those things which render mankind unfit to be par-

takers of the kingdom of God, by implanting a new and powerful principle of action, and working an entire renovation in the soul, which may very fitly be compared to a new birth. Nicodemus, still continuing full of hesitation and surprise, our Lord proceeded to inform him, that the thing would not appear so mysterious, when rightly understood, as his prejudices induced him to think it was, but might, as to the probability of it, be illustrated by a familiar simile; *Marvel not*, says he, *that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. The wind bloweth were it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell from whench it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit:* The meaning of these words seems to be, that, though the entire renovation of heart, which Christ's religion required, might seem impossible to the blind eyes of carnal men, it might nevertheless be true: for in the natural world, there are so many things of so fine a texture, that we cannot discern them with our eyes, but it is very manifest that they exist, and they are very great and powerful in their effects. The wind is a thing altogether invisible, no man can behold its body or trace its motion, even when it blows with the greatest violence; yet that there is such a thing is sufficiently evident, and the effects of it are universally known: thus therefore, that regeneration, or renovation which is wrought in the heart of man, by the powerful agency of the Spirit of God, though, in itself, it be invisible, and not at all discernable by the sight or sense: yet, in its effects, it is a great and plain thing, and really as great and manifest a change in the nature and disposition, the desires and pursuits of the soul, and conducing as much to all the purposes of divine and eternal life, as the birth of man does to this mortal life.

Though these arguments were plain, and not to be evaded or denied, yet Nicodemus retained his prejudices; this system of spiritual religion was contrary

to his apprehensions, nor could he see how the children of Abraham could stand in need of a renovation and change, equal to that which the infant finds, when born, to fit them for the kingdom of God; and therefore, the ruler of Israel, inquired, *How can these things be?* To which our great Redeemer replied, that it was strange he should be so hard to be instructed, *Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?* Art thou a teacher of others, and yet unable to discern things which I have so plainly revealed? Our Lord then proceeded to inform him that he was certain of the truth of what he had advanced concerning the new birth, and therefore it ought to be received; but if these plain and easy truths, relating to the spiritual nature of the Messiah's kingdom, were so slowly received by men of the first eminence and understanding in the nation, how would they be able to comprehend the more sublime and noble doctrines of the gospel, which he was come to preach to the sons of men. Our Redeemer further proceeded to inform Nicodemus, that it was the indispensable duty of mankind to attend to his ministry, because he came with superior credentials, and higher authority than ever man had before him. Moses had never ascended into heaven, but received his law from the top of Mount Sinai: none of the ancient prophets had descended from the blessed abodes, to teach mankind; whereas the Son of God came down from heaven, fully commissioned from above: he had been favoured with the clearest and most extensive view of spiritual things, and was fully acquainted with the deepest recesses of the divine councils; nay, at this very time, is present with God in heaven, and at one comprehensive view, beholdest the extent of the universe; he is conscious to all the gracious intentions of the King of heaven towards the human race, and, of consequence, must be superior in authority and dignity to Moses, or any other person who hath appeared in the world

Our great Redeemer, before the conference concluded, took occasion to set the inquiring ruler to rights, respecting the kingdom of the Messiah, concerning which he so much wanted to be informed. He gave him to understand, that the nation in general, were greatly mistaken in their views of that exalted person setting up a temporal kingdom, and assuming the authority and command of an illustrious and powerful conqueror; on the contrary, this divine teacher explained to Nicodemus, that it was conformable to the language of the ancient prophesy, as well as the councils of heaven, that the Messiah, when he appeared in the world, should be poor and despised; that he should assume no titles of honor, but be exposed to a variety of misery, poverty and wretchedness; and of consequence, his kingdom must not be a temporal but spiritual kingdom; and the deliverance, which he came to procure for his people, was not from temporal evils, but eternal wrath. This deliverance, he proceeded to inform the noble Pharisee, must be procured by his sufferings and death, by which, whosoever believed on him, would be reinstated in the divine favour, and made eternally happy: but whosoever refused to receive him as their Saviour, and persisted in their obstinacy and their unbelief would certainly perish for ever, and justly fall into so severe a condemnation, because their unbelief would not arise from want of evidence of the truth of his mission, but from their own inveterate prejudices, and the habitual wickedness of their hearts and lives. *He that believeth on him is not condemned,* said he, *but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he believeth not in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

This excellent and pathetic discourse of our Lord, had an effect on Nicodemus proportionable to the importance of it; he not only believed that JESUS was

a teacher sent from God, but was convinced that he was that great person who was to be the Reedeemer of Israel. He constantly defended him in the council; and when JESUS was put to death, by the impious rage, and unexampled cruelty of the Jews, he, in conjunction with Joseph of Arimathea, begged the body of our Lord, of the Roman governor, and bestowed on him the honor of a decent funeral, when all the rest of his disciples had forsaken him.

CHAPTER X.

CHRIST *converses with the woman of Samaria, and revealeth himself unto her: he heals the nobleman's son at Cana, while he lay sick at Capernaum. He repairs to Capernaum, and having called more disciples, he preaches in Galilee, and delivers his sermon on the mount.*

THE feast of the passover being ended, JESUS departed from Jerusalem, and went to some of the obscurer parts of Judea; probably he might retire to the bank of the river Jordan, where he had been baptized, and had received the honour of the divine approbation, and testimony of a voice from heaven, that he was the Son of God. The holy Jesus, remained a considerable time, and his disciples baptized great numbers of people, while his fame was spread through several parts of the country.

John the Baptist was not yet cast into prison, but continued preaching and baptizing, probably at Bethabara, the place of his former residence. Some of the Jews, hence took occasion to dispute with the disciples of John, about the propriety of this, and wanted to be informed, whether the baptism of JESUS was not superior to that of their master. Not being willing themselves to decide this controversy, or answer so important a question, they applied to the Baptist himself. The prophet took occasion to remind them, how often he had declared, that the person they mentioned, was the Messiah, whom God had sent into the world, to accomplish the designs of his grace, in the salvation of sinners; and that himself was no more than a messenger to prepare the way before this illustrious person. He likewise proceeded to inform them, that his own ministry now was on the decline, and would soon be at an end; *He must increase*, said he, *but I must decrease*. The holy man

continued his testimony concerning CHRIST, by giving his inquiring disciples to understand that he was above all; and as much superior to him, as the heavens were above the earth; and though, comparatively speaking, no man received his testimony, though he was low and despicable in the eyes of mankind, yet he was in the highest estimation in the heavenly world; that he was the well-beloved of his Father, and the heir of all things, both in heaven and earth; that the fulness of the divine Spirit dwelt in him, and it was of the utmost importance to mankind to hear, believe in, and obey him. And then the holy man concluded his ministry with these remarkable words, *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

Soon after this, the holy Baptist departed from the banks of Jordan, and leaving the wilderness of Judea, repaired to Galilee, and often visited the court of Herod, who seemed to attend to his precepts, and take delight in his company and conversation: but as the Baptist was too strictly virtuous to flatter that prince, he took occasion severely to reprimand him, on account of his cohabiting with the princess Herodias. This roused the rage of that haughty woman, who, on that account, procured his imprisonment and death, as before related.

In the mean time, the blessed JESUS continued in the wilderness of Judea; great multitudes resorted to him, attended on his divine instructions, beheld the miracles he wrought, and were baptized by his disciples. His popularity daily increasing, it excited the envy of the Pharisees, on which account, our Lord thought proper to retire into Galilee, and there continue that great work which he had so successfully begun.

In this journey he passed through Samaria, and being fatigued with travelling, and overpowered with the heat of the day, he sat down to rest by the side of a noted well, near the city of Sychar (which was reported to be given by the patriarch Jacob to his son Joseph) while his disciples repaired to the city to purchase provisions.

Before their return, a woman came from the city to draw water at the well, and JESUS being thirsty, asked her to give him to drink. The woman, knowing him to be a Jew, was very much surprised at this request; for the hatred between the Jews and Samaritans, which had commenced four hundred years before this time, still continued, and was, on all occasions carried on by each party: *How is it*, said she, *that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.* Little did the woman think, that no less a person than the Son of God, requested this small favour at her hands: had she been acquainted with his high dignity, she would certainly, without hesitation, have granted his request. But JESUS, perceiving her delay, proceeded to let her know, that he was well able to make her the most noble and beneficial return for the favour he asked. *If thou*, said he, *knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, give me to drink: thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.* The woman surprised to hear such a declaration, and no doubt, perceiving something awfully majestic, and divinely amiable in the countenance of our Lord, without attending to his first request was touched with a curiosity to know who this stranger was, and how he could come at the water he spoke of: *Sir*, said, she, *thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?* JESUS replied to this question, *Whosoever drinketh of this*

water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him, a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. Thus this divine teacher, from the circumstances of the sitting by the side of a well, and the woman preparing to draw water, described the most beautiful allegory, the efficacy and effects of divine grace, and at the same time represented the plenitude and perpetuity of its happy consequences, which remain to an eternal duration. But the woman, still understanding the words of our Lord in their plain literal sense, requested to give her a draught of the water he spoke of, that she might thirst no more, nor have occasion to come daily to that well to draw. Our Redeemer then turned the discourse in such a manner, as gave him an opportunity of letting the woman understand, that he was acquainted with her former and present way of life, and all her circumstances and affairs.—*Sir*, says she, *I perceive that thou art a prophet:* and being convinced of his superior knowledge, she desired his opinion of a question which was a matter of contention between the Jews and Samaritans, whether the temple at Jerusalem, or mount Gerizim was the place were God would be worshipped: *Our Fathers*, said she, *worshipped in this mountain: but ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place were men ought to worship.* Our Lord, in answer to her inquiry, informed her, that the time would soon approach, when the worship of God would not be confined, either to that mountain or Jerusalem; but the great King of the universe, would be willing to accept all true spiritual worshippers, without any regard to the place were they worshipped. *God*, said he, *is a Spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* The woman replied to this, that she supposed this point would be settled by the Messiah, who was shortly expected to come, both by the Jews and the Samaritans. *I know*, said she, *that the Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell*

us all things. To this JESUS directly replied, *I that speak unto thee am he.*

Just at the moment when JESUS had told the woman that he was the Messiah, the disciples returned; and finding their master in close conversation with one that was a native of Samaria, and of consequence an enemy to the Jews, and to the temple worship at Jerusalem, they were very much surprised: but the woman, having heard JESUS call himself the Messiah, left her pitcher at the well, and ran to the city, to publish the glad-tidings, that the Redeemer was then sitting at Jacob's well, and had told her all the secret transactions of her life. This declaration filled the listening Samaritans with the highest astonishment, and at the same time raised their curiosity to see this extraordinary person, whom Moses and the prophets had foretold, and of whose appearance, there was at that time, so universal an expectation.

During this interval, the disciples set before their Lord the provisions which they had been procuring, and requested him to eat; but he seemed little to regard their intreaties, having turned his thoughts to divine meditations: but being further urged, he replied, *that he had meat to eat which they knew not of;* and gave them to understand, that it was meat and drink to him to do the will, and proceed in the work of his heavenly Father: then looking about him, and seeing the Samaritans coming in crowds from their city, he said to his disciples, *Say ye not that there are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest; and he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit into life eternal, that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.* By this our Lord instructed his wondering disciples, and let them know that the conversion of these Samaritans, who were now in great crowds surrounding him, was a greater satisfaction to

him, than the pleasure he could receive from the refreshment he might have experienced in partaking of their provisions: he let them know, that to gather this spiritual harvest, and finish the work of his heavenly Father, was his proper food; and adding, for the encouragement of his disciples, that as they had laboured with him in this harvest of souls, so should they be partakers in the eternal harvest of joy, which would be the reward of their diligence in the work of God.

The words of the woman had taken such an effect on the inhabitants of the city, that many of them believed that Jesus was certainly the Messiah; and when they crowded about him with wonder and joy, their first request was, that he would condescend to go to their city, and take his abode amongst them. The kind, indulgent Saviour of sinners was so favourable to them, that he complied with their petition, and staid with them two days. This time he spent in preaching the kingdom of God, and instructing them in the nature of his religion. Such success attended his ministry, that a great number of the inhabitants of the city believed on him, and declared unto the woman at his departure, *Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the World.*

Our Lord, having thus favoured the Samaritans with his heavenly instructions, left the city of Sychar, and continued his journey to Galilee: and though he did not expect much honor or esteem amongst his countrymen, he would not neglect giving them an opportunity of receiving his heavenly doctrine. He had performed several miracles at Jerusalem, during the late feast of the passover, at which many of the inhabitants of Galilee were present: his preaching amongst them, in consequence of this, was at first attended with great success, and he dwelt some small time at Cana, where he had turned the water into

wine, and both himself and his doctrine were kindly received.

While he abode at that city, a nobleman of Capernaum having heard of the many miracles he performed, came to him, and addressed him with the utmost reverence and respect; at the same time humbly beseeching him to come to Capernaum, and heal his son, who lay at the point of death. Our Lord was so compassionate, as to comply with the latter part of the request, but thought proper to give the concerned parent to understand, that there was no necessity for him to take a journey to Capernaum to effect this cure; for that great Being, who was present in all places, could perform his mighty works, without personally appearing at the place where the miracle was wrought: Jesus, therefore dismissed the father, with a declaration that his son was restored to health, but refused to accompany him to his city: *Go thy way*, said he, *thy son liveth.* The nobleman not doubting the truth of what our Lord had declared, departed to his house; but, before his arrival, he was met on the road by his servants, who brought the joyful news, that his son was perfectly recovered. The father inquired, at what time they perceived the first alteration in him; the servants replied, *Yesterday, at the seventh hour, the fever left him.* By this, the joyful father perceived, that his son recovered immediately as Jesus had spoken the words, *thy son liveth;* and was fully convinced, that this cure was performed by the mighty power of God. This amazing instance of divine power and goodness, fully convinced the nobleman, and all his family, not only that Jesus was a true prophet, but that he was the Messiah, that great deliverer of his people, so long expected in the world.

Some short time after this, Jesus departed from Cana, and went to Nazareth, the place where he had been brought up, and where he had dwelt till he entered on his public ministry. There, as had been his con-

stant custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and attended on the reading of the law and the prophets. After the passages appointed for the service of the day were read, JESUS took the book from the hand of the person who officiated, and opened it on this celebrated prediction of the Messiah, in the prophecy of Isaiah, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*

It is the opinion of some learned and judicious commentators, that our Lord read this passage in native Hebrew, which was then a dead language, and as it was known by his townsmen, that he was not learned, it excited their admiration, especially when he expounded it with such clearness of judgment, and beauty of expression; and what the more raised their astonishment, he applied it to himself: but as he had performed no miracles in their city, they seemed to be offended: perhaps they imagined, that the place of his nativity should have claimed his first regard, and that his friends and townsmen should have been the objects of his peculiar care; and as it appeared, that with a word, he could heal the sick or diseased, at a distance, it is very likely, they thought that there should not have been one sick, lame, or blind person, at Nazareth. That they really entertained such sentiments as these, is plain from our Saviour's own words, *Ye will surely say to me, Physician, heal thyself; whatever we have had done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country:* they seem to have hinted to our Lord, that it was unkind in him to heal the nobleman's son at Capernaum, and take no notice of the sick and diseased as Nazareth; which being the place of his nativity and residence, should have been a larger sharer in his benevolence and care, than those cities

which were unknown to him, and therefore could have no claim on his goodness. To this insinuation, our Lord thought fit to reply, by giving them an account of the conduct of the two great prophets Elijah and Elisha, who were directed by the God of Israel, to exert those miraculous powers, which he had given them, in favour of Heathens, when many of the people of Israel stood in need of their assistance. *I tell you of a truth*, said he, *many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elizeus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.* No sooner had our Redeemer spoken these words, than the synagogue was in an uproar; the whole assembly foamed with rage, and was the more unruly and turbulent, because none of them knew how to reply; but forgetting the solemnity of the Sabbath, they seized the Saviour of the world, and took him by force, to the brow of the hill on which their city stood, thinking to have thrown him down, and dashed him to pieces; but no sooner were they come to the place where they intended to have put their cruel designs in execution, than they were impressed with awe; and each looked on the other, none daring to make the horrid attempt. Our Redeemer perceiving the consternation which they were in, departed from amongst them, and none presumed to detain him.

Our Saviour being thus treated by the blind, outrageous fury of his townsmen, and the cruel usage he had received, removed his place of residence, and some time abode at Capernaum. This was the ca[illegible] city of Galilee, and was built on the borders of [illegible] lake of Genesareth.

It may not be improper in this place, to give a s[illegible]

account of this lake. It is called, in the Old Testament, the sea of Chinnereth; but, in the Evangelists, it has three several names: it is called the sea of Galilee, from the province where it was situated; the sea of Tiberias, from a city of that name on its western shore; and the lake of Genezareth, from the name of a considerable part of Galilee, extending along its western shore. According to Josephus, it was twenty-two miles in length, and five in breadth: the bottom being of gravel, rendered the water both clear and good tasted: it was said to be softer than either fountain or river water, and at the same time so cold, that it would not grow warm, though exposed to the rays of the sun in the hottest season of the year. The river Jordan runs through this lake, and it abounds with plenty of excellent fish, and some sorts that are not to be found in any other place.

The countries surrounding this lake, according to the above-mentioned historian, were fertile and populous, especially the two Galilees, which contained a great number of towns and villages, the least of which included fifteen hundred souls. On the east side, were the cities of Chorasin, Bethsaida, Gadara, and Hippon; on the west, Capernaum, Tiberias, and Tarrichea. From all these advantages, it was a common saying amongst the Jews, that God had a peculiar love to the sea of Galilee: and if we consider, that, added to the above-named privileges, it was so often favoured with the presence of our great Redeemer, we must allow that the observation was just; for frequent were his excursions on these waters, while he dwelt at Capernaum; and once he honoured them with his presence, and worked a miracle in their streams, after he had risen from the dead.

It was the divine will, that JESUS should spend a considerable time in preaching, and working miracles, to confirm the truth of his divine mission, and instruct his disciples in the doctrine which they were after-

wards to preach through all the nations of the world. He did not chuse to take up his abode at Jerusalem, because he knew the opposition which he would meet with from the Scribes and Pharisees, the chief priests and rulers, and the great men of the nation. The ambition and envy of these men would never have suffered so celebrated a teacher as JESUS CHRIST, to have resided amongst them. Our Lord therefore chose to reside at Capernaum, where he had lately, by restoring the nobleman's son, procured himself friends, and he was sure of a kind reception. Nor is it unlikely, that so great and benevolent a miracle should be generally known in the city, and not have influenced the minds of the inhabitants in favour of our Redeemer, while it prepared them for the reception of his heavenly doctrine. This city seemed a place highly convenient for the execution of his great and benevolent designs; for it being the capital of the country, and nearly bordering on the lake, it was frequently crowded with merchants and traders; who, on their return to their respective countries, might spread the report of what they might be eye and ear witnesses of; and by this means, the miracles and doctrine of the Saviour of the world, might be related in distant places. It was in the city of Capernaum, and the adjacent cities and villages bordering on the lake, that our great Redeemer spent two out of three years of his public life; most commonly going to Jerusalem at the public feasts, but soon returning. He frequently preached in the synagogues on the Sabbath-day, not only in Capernaum, but in the other cities of Galilee; and often the country villages, the fields, the mountains, the plains, and the waters of the lake were blessed with his presence; and his heavenly doctrine was learned by the attentive multitudes who followed him, to hear his words and see his wondrous works.

It was in one of these excursions, that he called Simon and Andrew. These disciples were following their occupation of fishing on the lake: they had known

him before, and immediately followed him. Soon after he saw James and John who were busy in the same employment: he called them also, and they readily obeyed. Perhaps, they might have been acquainted with our Redeemer on the banks of Jordan; or if not, his call was accompanied with such a manifestation of divine power, that all their scruples were overcome, and with a joyful readiness and elevation of mind, they followed the Saviour of the world.

Accompanied by these disciples, our blessed Redeemer took a tour through several cities, towns and villages in Galilee: the time he spent in this progress, is not particularly noted by the evangelists, but we are told, that he wrought a great number of miracles, that he healed the diseases of those that applied to him, and performed such wonderful works, that his fame drew great multitudes of people after him, not only from Galilee, but the remoter parts of Judea, and even from beyond Jordan: nor was the fame of the wonders he performed, confined to the land of Israel, for the inhabitants of Syria brought their sick unto the province of Galilee, to be healed by the Saviour of mankind.

The blessed JESUS, perceiving himself followed by a vast multitude of people, who all crowded around him, with the utmost earnestness and attention, ascended a mountain that was near at hand, and placing himself on an eminence, while all the people stood on the sides of the hill, he addressed the listening throng from thence; and with the most intelligent simplicity and plainness, joined with the most powerful heart-affecting energy, he inculcated in them the moral precepts of his religion.

He began his divine discourse, with the doctrine of happiness, a subject which had claimed the first attention of the schools of the philosophers, and the wise men of the age; and a subject, which, in its own nature,

claims the consideration of every intelligent being, and the more so, as the wisest of mankind have differed very much in their definitions what true happiness is, as well as the means by which it is to be attained. The Jews in general, concluded it to consist in opulence, grandeur, and glory; on that account they wished to see the Messiah's kingdom, because they supposed it would be a temporal dominion, and that a golden sceptre, instead of a *sceptre of righteousness*, would be the *sceptre of his kingdom:* and so prevailing was the opinion of the temporal reign of the Messiah, that the disciples themselves retained this notion, till after his resurrection, and probably were induced to follow him at first, by the expectation of high honors and rewards.

The blessed JESUS, therefore, thought fit to shew his hearers in general, and his disciples in particular, their mistakes in so important a point, and let them know, that happiness did not consist in the abundance of things possessed, nor in the opinion which the world might form concerning them, but in an entire resignation of mind to the will of God, who is perfectly wise and good, who orders and disposes all things with the utmost accuracy and exactness, so as to promote the best interest of his people; and an acknowledgment of his superior wisdom, and our own blindness and folly, tends to the ease and quiet of our minds, when we are oppressed and afflicted, and cannot discern the wise ends of his dispensations. *Blessed*, said our great Redeemer, *are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* And though the sense of our own meanness and unworthiness might excite us to mourn, and fill us with sorrow of heart, the divine teacher informed his hearers, that this was a true sign of succeeding happiness: *Blessed*, said he, *are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.* Our exalted Redeemer further proceeded to inform his attentive hearers, that true happiness did not consist in the gratification of their inordinate passions and inclinations,

but in the suppressing of them, and keeping them within the bounds of reason and religion. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* The divine teacher then proceeded to observe, that happiness did not consist in what the world calls conquest and glory; for tyrants and conquerors, who disturb the peace, and destroy the comforts of mankind are most deplorably miserable: but true happiness falls to the share of those who are lovers of peace, and seek to promote kindness, benevolence, and all the social affections amongst men; for they imitate the perfection of heavenly goodness, which so conspicuously shines in their Maker, and will therefore be called his children. *Blessed are the peace makers,* said our exalted Redeemer, *for they shall be called the children of God.* And if these holy and amiable persons, should not at first find that happiness which they are entitled to as heirs of heaven; though they should be reviled and persecuted by the wicked of this world; though they should be deprived of their comforts, and undergo the severest trials; yet the great Saviour of mankind pronounces them blessed. *Blessed,* said he, *are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Solid contentment and true happiness, the heavenly teacher informs us, are not to be expected from the praise of men, nor from the noise of popular applause, but will hereafter be the portion of those who are falsely reviled for their integrity and uprightness, and their steady attachment to truth; such persons measurably partake of the sufferings of CHRIST: and it was by these persecutions, and the contempt of the world, that the prophets have been in all ages distinguished. *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad*

for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Such were the declarations of the Son of God, with reference to the happiness of man; after which, the blessed Jesus addressed himself to his disciples, and pointed out their duty as preachers of the gospel, designed by the sovereign Ruler of all things, to teach his will, and lead others in the paths of eternal happiness. But, as the doctrine which he had advanced was so directly contrary to the traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees, our Redeemer thought it necessary to inform his disciples, that he had no intention to destroy the moral precepts contained in the law and the prophets, but to fulfil and confirm them. Nothing is more firm, and fixed on a more immoveable basis, than the great precepts of morality: these, being copied from the perfections of God, must remain fixed and immovable: the eternal laws of righteousness cannot be altered; heaven and earth will pass away, but the moral law of God will always remain the same. This our great Redeemer strictly enjoined his disciples to inforce in the strongest manner, both by precept and example; and gave them several instances in which the Scribes and Pharisees had interpreted the moral law in too loose and careless a manner. He then condescended to assist their devotions, by teaching them that excellent form of Prayer, which is called by his name, and is in constant use among Christians.

Our Father which art in Heaven. The great Creator and Preserver of men, may be, with the highest propriety called our Father; for it is to his almighty power, that we owe our existence; he is, in a peculiar and distinguishing manner called the Father of spirits, because he alone is the author of all spiritual existence. The form of our bodies owes its original, to his boundless, unerring wisdom, and all our active powers are the produce of his all-creating goodness. Nor is it only by right of creation, that the eternal God may

justly claim the title of our Father; but the same endearing appellation is due to him on account of our daily preservation: he watches over us, with the care of a Father, and we are constantly made sharers in the benefits of his paternal tenderness and protection. But there is still another and more emphatical sense, wherein God is the Father of his people: it is by the almighty power of his spirit, that they are regenerated; and this great work is frequently, in the New Testament, styled being born of God: by this it is, that, poor, lost, undone sinners, are formed anew, so that partaking of his divine nature, they become his children indeed, and are permitted to lift up their eyes to the great King of the universe, and call him their Father. In the former sense, God is the Father of the creation, and a parent to all his creatures, good or bad: but in the latter sense, he is a Father only to his own people, who are converted by his almighty power and spirit, enabled to believe in his Son, and to live such lives as are consistent with the rules of his gospel. Father, is the most grand and magnificent title which can be found in the whole compass of nature, and it conveys the most honorable and lovely idea that can be formed in the human mind: it is particularly happy in marking the essential character of the true God, who is the great Father of the universe. This noble and tender appellation not only displays him as the first cause of all things, but gives us a beautiful and lovely idea of his tenderness and care, which he extends over all his creatures, whom he nourishes with an affection, and protects with a watchfulness and care, vastly superior to an earthly parent. We are permitted and encouraged to call the eternal God our Father, to encourage our hope in his goodness, and mercy, in granting us every request that is not improper to be bestowed: for a father would not deny a petition to a child, if it was in his power to give, and the petition was fit to be granted: and at the same time, our being permitted to call God our Father, should raise in us an holy emulation, by exciting us to

consider what sort of children we ought to be, who claim so high and honorable a relation And our being exhorted to call God our Father, in the plural number, ought to put us in mind that we are all brethren, the children of one common parent, and that we should love one another in sincerity, and sincerely and fervently pray for the good of each other.

Which art in heaven. By these words, we are commanded to express the glory, majesty, and power of the great God: his presence is not confined to the heavenly worlds; the heaven of heavens cannot contain him; the whole universe lies open to his eye: his presence extends itself through the infinitude of space: at one vast comprehensive view, he beholds the whole creation, past, present, and to come; heaven is his throne, and earth is his foot-stool; the night and the day, the darkness and the light, are equal to him: he sees all things both in heaven and in earth; *even hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.* But, by God's being in heaven, we are to understand, that this is the place where his glories are plainest seen, and where he is best worshipped.

Hallowed be thy name. By the name of God, the Hebrews understood the divine Majesty himself, all his attributes, and his works; and therefore, we are to understand by this petition, a desire in the worshipper, that the honour, dignity, glory, and majesty of the Great Creator, may be displayed and exalted amongst men; as much as though we should pray, may thy existence be universally believed, thy supremacy over all things acknowledged, thy goodness believed and confided in, and may all men think well, honourably, and worthily of thee, of all thy works, and all thy ways, and all thy dealings towards them.

Thy kingdom come. May thy glorious gospel, and the spiritual kingdom of thy Son, be extended over the whole earth; and may all ignorance, superstition,

idolatry, and iniquity, be driven before the glorious rising of the Sun of righteousness.

Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. May the sons of men be turned from darkness to light, and from sin and Satan to the knowledge of thyself, and by the divine aids of thy Spirit, may they be enabled to do thy will, as steadily and sincerely, though not with such perfection, as it is done by the angels of light in the heavenly world.

Give us this day our daily bread. Be pleased, O thou great parent of the universe! who suppliest all thy creatures from the rich fountain of thy fulness, to give us day by day, such a portion of thy creature-comforts, as may enable us to serve thee with cheerfulness and satisfaction of mind.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. God being the supreme and righteous governor of the world, he hath a right to punish those who break his just and equitable laws. The suffering of punishment is therefore a debt, which sinners owe to supreme justice: and when we are commanded to pray, that God will forgive us our debts, the meaning is, that he will remit that dreadful punishment due to our sins. This enormous debt, the great king of the universe, on account of the satisfaction which his justice has received, in the blood and righteousness of his Son, is ready to forgive to all that believe in him, with such a lively and powerful faith, as produces a steady and prevailing obedience to his gospel. But the infinite mercy of God in forgiving our transgressions, ought at all times to be remembered by us, in such a manner as to soften our minds, and inspire them with a readiness to forgive those who have transgressed against us. We give but a poor evidence, that by a sincere and influential faith, we are become partakers of divine forgiveness, if we indulge an unforgiving temper of mind,

and pursue with inexorable and implacable resentment, those who have transgressed against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Deliver us, O thou eternal Father of our spirits! thou great maker and supporter of the feeble frame of our bodies! from such temptations as thou knowest will be too hard for us. Preserve us, O Lord! from such temptations as are too powerful for human nature, either by removing them from us, or granting such a measure of thy grace, and such assistance from thy holy Spirit, as may enable us to overcome. Make us sensible, O our God! how weak and frail we are; may we never presume on our own strength, but depending on thy grace, may we, in thy might, be enabled to overcome all our spiritual foes, and be preserved to thy heavenly kingdom.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Thou, O God! art the eternal, universal monarch, thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion extendeth over all: the government of the universe is thine, and thou reignest the great independent King of the creation: thou, by thine infinite power, first didst establish, and now preservest the stupendous frame of nature: all power in heaven and earth is in thine hand, thou canst do what thou pleasest, and none can stay thine hand, or say unto thee, What doest thou? Thou art able, by thine almighty power, to protect and defend all thy faithful servants; and thou holdest omnipotence in thine hand to crush thy daring foes. Thou art all perfect and all glorious; thou art possessed of every attribute and every perfection which justly renders thee the object of supreme adoration and the delight of the whole rational and intelligent creation. We adore thine almighty, thine irresistible power; we venerate thy boundless, thine unsearchable wisdom; we reverence thine impartial, thine inflexible justice; we rejoice in the glories of thine all-supporting goodness: and ex-

ult in the contemplation of thine immutable mercy. Open our eyes, O Lord! that we may see thy glory. May we be enabled at all times to bless and praise thy holy name, and may we be of the number of those, whose delightful employment will be to do thy will, and sing thy praises for ever and ever.

Such was the prayer which the Son of God himself delivered to the multitude who surrounded him; from which it may be learned, that the great King of the universe, who is seated on the exalted throne of heaven, surrounded by angels and archangels, and constantly adored by all the holy and happy inhabitants of the upper world, is so kind and condescendingly good, as to hear the cries, and attend to the petitions of sinful men. What an animating, heart-reviving thought it is, that poor, frail, sinful creatures, are permitted to stand before the throne of the eternal God, and call him our Father! The glimmering light of the dim-winking taper, which sleeps in its socket, is not more exceeded by the splendor and glory of the sun shining in his strength, than the brightness of the throne, the extent of the dominions, the power, glory, and majesty of the great King of the creation, exceeds the most exalted prince on earth. Earthly princes are so proud, and their ministers and attendants so covetous and haughty, that they are rendered inaccessible to the greatest part of their subjects; but the great Monarch of the universe, the supreme Lord of heaven and earth, is easy of access; he calls upon sinners to seek his face, and the meanest of mankind may at all times have free access to his exalted throne. How blind and stupid, how regardless of their best interest, how cruel to themselves are those men who will not pray! We are poor necessitous creatures; we stand in need of various blessings; God hath all things to give; and God hath said, *ask and ye shall receive:* he hath erected a throne of grace, and is at all times ready to hear and answer our prayers; and shall we be so very deficient as not to pray? Shall we, when in distress, and

pressed with the most urgent necessities, stand at a gloomy distance, and refuse to ask? What folly and madness is this? It is highly incumbent on all who have neglected this duty, to consider their ways, to treasure up our Lord's words in their hearts, and daily, with fervent prayer, approach the throne of that God, who is willing to hear, and able to help, in every time of need. And when we seriously reflect on this excellent Prayer proposed by the Son of God, and are admiring the vast extent of divine mercy and forgiveness, we ought to remember, that in this Prayer, we are reminded of our duty to forgive one another; and we may learn from hence, that a mild, placable, forgiving spirit, is not only well-pleasing to our heavenly Father, but has a manifest tendency in its own nature, to prepare us, in the habitual temper of our minds, for the forgiveness of God.

The next point, which our Lord treated on, in his admirable sermon, was the duty of fasting. In this part of his discourse, he severely blamed the conduct of the Pharisees, who made the greatest ostentation of their religion, and were particularly fond of mortification and fasting. Hence that they might be remarked for superior degrees of strictness and sanctity, and appear to men of the most recluse and mortified disposition, they disfigured their faces, and appeared with sad and sorrowful countenances; but our Lord enjoins us not to perform our religious exercises, with design to be seen of men, but, with all uprightness and sincerity of heart, to regard the omnipresence of our heavenly Father, who *seeth in secret* and will *reward openly* all his faithful worshippers. The divine orator then turned his discourse to another subject, and inculcated the necessity of heavenly-mindedness on his attentive and respectable audience. So vastly important in their nature, and extensive in their duration, are the concerns of the soul above those of the body, that it is the highest wisdom of man, closely to attend to heavenly things, and at all times to give them the

preference to the frail and fleeting trifles of this present world. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth*, said the heavenly Teacher, *where moth and rust doth corrupt, aad where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* The shortness and uncertainty of our abode in this present state, with the many disasters which may happen to us, and take away our worldly possessions, should excite us not to put our trust or confidence in any thing which belongs to this world; it is greater wisdom to contemplate on heavenly things, to consider their superior excellency, and the extent of their duration, with such a fixed and unremitting attention, as may work in the soul an habitual desire after them, and prepare us in the prevailing temper of our minds, for the enjoyment of them.

Our Lord was more the earnest in recommending this heavenly-mindedness to his hearers, because it was a doctrine which they had not been used to hear from their former teachers. The Jewish doctors were in general, strangers to the blessedness and glory of an happy eternity. The rewards promised to the keepers of the law, were chiefly of a temporal nature; and as it was the gospel of CHRIST, which brought *life and immortality to light*, the doctrine of eternal happiness was the peculiar province of our Redeemer; and that they might not suppose that the heavenly mindedness which he recommended, was consistent with a covetous and anxious desire after worldly riches, our Lord informs them that these things are directly contrary to each other. *No man*, says he, *can serve two masters; for either he will love the one and hate the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other: ye cannot serve God and mammon!*

Our Lord proceeded to enforce the heavenly doc-

trine by ascertaining the universality of the providence of God, and his paternal care over the least and meanest of his creatures. *Behold*, says he, *the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?* If the providence of God extends to the meanest and most insignificant of his creatures, and his wisdom hath so conducted his wide creation, that there is abundant provision made for the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field, shall his creature man, whom he hath placed at the head of his lower creation, and made the object of his peculiar care, be over anxious and careful, or gloomy and discontented for fear he should not be able to procure food and raiment? How unworthy is this of his superior reason, and how dishonorable to his great Maker, and most bountiful Benefactor! Thus the divine Teacher led the most ignorant and illiterate of his hearers to entertain great and sublime ideas of God and his providence; and gave them a more elevated and extensive view of the nature of his government than had been taught in the schools of the philosophers: for though they believed that there was a God, and that he made and governed the world, they had but very dark and confused notions of his particular providence, as it relates to the state of every individual in his creation. This, our great Redeemer gave them to understand, was fixed by the universal Governor, with more exactness and precision, than was generally imagined, and less in the power of individuals to alter, by their utmost anxiety and care. *Which of you*, says he, *by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature?*

The illustrious preacher then proceeds from the animal, to the vegetable part of the creation, and infers the absurdity of anxious and vexatious cares concerning raiment. Can it be supposed that the great Being, who spread fresh verdure over the fields, and adorns them with those flowers which shine brighter than

the golden embroidery which glitters on the purple robes of kings, will not provide raiment for his own people? Will he thus clothe the inanimate, and neglect the noblest part of his creation? *Consider*, said the exalted Redeemer, *the lilies of the field, how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?* Let these considerations excite you, he adds, to be easy and quiet, patient and resigned to the allotments of Providence. *Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.* Make it your first great concern, to pursue the interests of your immortal souls, and rest not till you have obtained a rational and scriptural satisfaction, that your eternal interest is safe; and, when this great blessing is obtained, be not anxious or vexatiously careful concerning the things of time and sense, but rest assured, that *all these things*, so far as necessary to your supreme good, *shall be added unto you.*

The exalted Redeemer, now drawing towards the conclusion of his discourse, proceeded to forbid all rash and uncharitable judgment, either with regard to the general characters, or particular actions of men. This is an evil of the most attrocious kind; innocence and virtue often suffer, and, however sorry the slanderer may be for the wrong done, the injury cannot be repaired. No character is more hurtful to society, and no person more hateful to God and man, than the slanderer; and our Lord intimates that both God and man will resent the injury done to his creatures. *Judge not*, said he, *that ye be not judged.* If you judge charitably, said the kind and compassionate, the meek and benevolent Saviour of mankind; if you make allowances for the frailty of human nature, and are ready to pity and pardon those who have offended you, both your heavenly Father, and your fellow-mortals will

deal with you in the same manner. But if you are always ready to hear, and eager to spread slanderous reports; if you put the harshest construction on every action: if you are pleased to hear of another's misconduct, or misfortunes, and never touched with the feeling of your brother's infirmities; if you take all opportunities to injure him in the opinion of mankind, or pursue him with inexorable and implacable resentment; if you are a stranger to mercy or forgiveness, no mercy or forgiveness will you find, either from offended Omnipotence, or injured and insulted man.—*For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

In order to prevent mankind from passing rash and censorious judgment, our great Redeemer advises them to look unto themselves; and if they would carefully advert to their own errors and failings, they would find less time, as well as less desire, to censure the rest of mankind. It frequently happens, that those persons who are most ready to censure and condemn their fellow-creatures, and most eager to search out, and expose the failings of others, art not the most blameless themselves: but frequently more culpable than the persons whom they are so ready to accuse. It is therefore with the highest reason that our great Redeemer exhorted his hearers to look unto themselves, and carefully mend their own faults, which would be of greater service to them, than endeavouring to expose and scandalize those who are better than they. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye: or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and behold, a beam is in thine own eye. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

Such are the several branches of moral righteousness inculcated by the Son of God; but some are so perverse in their dispositions, and so obstinately attached to their evil practices and errors, that it is impossible to reclaim them; and therefore our Saviour advises his followers not to attempt it: *Give not*, says he, *that which is holy unto the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they tread them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.* Lastly, that it might not be supposed that the moral precepts of christianity were above the attainment of mankind, our Lord proceeded to inform his hearers, how gracious, and full of compassion, their heavenly father was, and how ready to hear and assist all who called upon him; and in consequence advised them humbly to intreat his assistance, and at the same time that they exerted their utmost endeavours to do his will, and be found in the way of his commandments. *Ask*, says he, *and it shall be given; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.* Our Lord appeals to their own feelings towards their children, as an encouragement to be earnest in their petitions to their heavenly Father: *If ye being evil*, says he, *know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?* But, that they might not depend on the divine assistance without the diligent exertion of their utmost endeavours, our Lord immediately adds, *Enter ye in at the straight gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it.*

The illustrious preacher, before he concluded his discourse, proceeded to warn his hearers of false prophets and teachers, who would come with fair pretences; but as their lives and conversations were not

answerable to their profession, nor honourable to the cause they espoused, they were to be despised and disregarded: *Ye shall know them by their fruits*, said the divine teacher; *do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.* It is not the pretences to extraordinary piety and goodness; it is not the most flaming zeal, or the most ardent devotion, that will compensate for a disregard to the divine commands, or a departure from the unvariable rules of righteousness and goodness. *It is not every one that saith Lord, Lord*, said the exalted Saviour of mankind, *shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* And then he sums up the whole with a beautiful and striking simile, intended to demonstrate the absolute necessity of such a regard to the words of CHRIST, influenced the mind and determined the conduct in an universal and persisting obedience: *Therefore*, said he, *whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.* Thus ended our Lord's excellent and admirable sermon. The multitudes stood around him with the utmost attention and surprise. The plain tokens of divinity which attended his discourse, joined with his all-commanding eloquence, attracted every eye, and affected every heart: but what surprised them the more was, the difference of his doctrine, from what they before had heard, *for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.*

CHAPTER XI.

CHRIST *having finished his sermon on the mount, repairs to Capernaum, and on his way there, is met by a leprous person, whom he cleanses: On his entering the city, he is accosted by a Roman Centurion, whose servant was ill of the palsy, whom he heals: He afterwards repairs to the Synagogue on the Sabbath day, where he dispossesseth a devil: He cures Peter's wife's mother of a fever, and many other diseased persons: He travels through Galilee; and directs the disciples to take a great draught of fishes.*

THE exalted Saviour of sinners, having finished his sermon, came down from the mountain, attended by a great concourse of people, who had listened to his discourse, with the mixt emotions of wonder and joy. They surrounded the divine person of our Redeemer, with the most respectful regard, and soon an incident arose which gave them fresh cause of wonder and praise. As he was on his way to Capernaum, he was met by a leprous person, who doubtless having heard of his wonderful works, and the condescending goodness with which he relieved the afflicted and diseased, threw himself with the utmost humility at his feet, and cried, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

The species of leprosy common amongst the Eastern nations, and the Jews, was very nauseous and infectious, as well as extremely hard to be cured. Our Lord was not deterred by this, from approaching an object so loathsome; but, full of pity, he condescended so far as to touch him, with this reply, *I will: be thou clean.* The dire infection immediately fled before the touch of the Son of God; who charged the person, thus instantaneously healed, not to publish the matter abroad, but go directly and shew himself to the priest,

offering, at the same time, the oblations which the law in such cases required.

The blessed JESUS then proceeded to Capernaum, but as he entered the city, he was accosted by a Roman centurion, who with the care and tenderness of an indulgent master, informed him of the dreadful condition of his servant, who was afflicted with a paralytic disorder, and grievously tormented with pain. The compassionate Redeemer of mankind, listened to his complaint with pitying attention, and replied to his address, that he would come and heal him. The centurion thought this goodness too much to be expected by one who was not of the Israelitish nation, and therefore told our Lord, that he was not worthy so illustrious a person should come under his roof; and he, very probably, having heard of the nobleman's son, who, while he lay sick at Capernaum, was healed by JESUS, when he was so far off as Cana, desired our Lord only to speak the word, and he doubted not but his servant would be healed; for he believed, that diseases and devils were as much under the command of our Redeemer, as his soldiers were subject to the will, and obeyed the word of their commander. Our Lord was well pleased with the centurion's faith, and commended it in the highest terms; *I have not found*, said he, *so great faith, no, not in Israel.*

The believing stranger, having applied the most exalted ideas of the divine power and goodness to JESUS CHRIST, who appeared to be no more than a man, our Lord took occasion, from the open confession of his faith, to declare the gracious design of his Almighty Father towards the Gentile world, and gave the surrounding multitude to understand, that the divine goodness was not confined to the seed of Abraham, nor to the land of Israel: *And I say unto you*, said he, *that many shall come from the East, and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.* And having a clear view of the obstinacy, impenitence, and final unbelief of the

Jewish nation, he added, *But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Having thus spoken to the listening throng, our Lord directed his discourse to the centurion, and said, *Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee;* and immediately the servant was healed.

On the next Sabbath day, JESUS went to the Jewish synagogue at Capernaum, and instructed the people with such energy and power, and at the same time, with such remarkable plainness and simplicity, that the congregation heard him with the greatest pleasure and surprise: and to increase their admiration, there was a person in the assembly, that was possessed by an unclean and wicked spirit, who cried out in the most dreadful manner: *Let us alone, what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee, who thou art, the Holy one of God.* But the blessed JESUS, who wanted no such testimony, commanded him to keep silence, and immediately come out of the man; this command, the wicked spirit durst not disobey, and directly complied, leaving the disordered person, to the astonishment of the whole congregation.

It is constantly alledged, by those who are enemies to our religion, and delight to cavil with the conduct of our Redeemer, and depreciate his mighty deeds, that the persons who are said in the gospels to be possessed by devils, were only affected by some strange and unaccountable disorders; and because sepulchres were esteemed polluted places, the melancholy persons who frequented them, were said to be possessed with the devil. And the adversaries of our religion, are fond of inquiring, why there should be any more dæmons in Judea, than in any other country.

To these objections it may, with great certainty be replied, that these dæmoniacs were not persons affect-

ed only with some uncommon and dreadful disease; for the evangelists have taken care to be very particular on that head: and being possessed with the devil is carefully distinguished from any other affliction and complaint: St. Matthew tells us, that, *They brought unto Christ, all sick people, that were taken with divers diseases, and those that were possessed with devils, and those that were Lunatic; and he healed them*, chap. iv. ver. 24. And again, chap. x. ver. i. *He gave to the apostles power against evil spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sicknesses and diseases.* And we are informed by St. Mark, chap. i. 34, *That they healed many that were sick of divers diseases and cast out devils.* There is in these passages a plain distinction between those who were sick of various diseases, and those who were possessed with devils; and this being distinctly noticed by the evangelists, it cannot be supposed, that there were not plain, evident marks of distinction, which made the cure so manifest that there was no danger of being deceived.

And it may further be observed, to those who doubt of the existence of evil spirits, that they cannot entertain such doubts without questioning the truth of the Holy Scriptures; for the sacred writers have laid down several particulars concerning those impious and envious beings; they have taken care to acquaint us with their original and fall, their names and numbers, their government and orders, their malicious designs, and various of their employments; and it is abundantly evident, both from sacred and prophane history, that before our Saviour's ascension, there were great numbers of persons possessed with evil spirits. These evil spirits had gained so great an ascendancy, and taken possession of so large a part of the world, that they reviled the great Creator in his worship; and in several Heathen nations, there were oracles which were applied to, in order to resolve the doubts, and answer the inquiries of their worshippers. And as the design of our Lord's incarnation, and his whole ministry, was *to*

destroy the works of the devil; perhaps, the reason why these apostate spirits were so frequently permitted to appear in Judea at this time, was, that the Son of God might, in a more manifest and triumphant manner, display his authority and power over the prince of darkness, and all his infernal legions, and thereby convince the wondering world, that he was really the Son of God, and the Saviour of mankind.

The fame of this miracle was soon spread over the neighbouring country. Our Redeemer had healed the sick, and done various wonderful works, which had excited the admiration of the people, and raised their expectations of something very great and advantageous to the Jewish nation, to arise from so extraordinary a person. But when the people beheld him, in the public assembly, with a commanding authority, dispossess the devil, and drive the powers of darkness before him; their astonishment increased, and they acknowledged that this was *the mighty power of God.*

Our Lord having performed this miracle in the synagogue, departed to Peter's house, whose wife's mother lay sick of a fever: he took her by the hand, and immediately the fever left her; and so perfectly was she restored to her former health, that *she arose and ministered unto him.* The evangelist Luke, in his account of this wonderful cure, says that *he rebuked the fever;* which is a figurative way of speaking, conformable to the language of the Scriptures, where not only the inanimate parts of the creation, but diseases, famine, pestilence, and the like, are personated and represented as the servants of the almighty, to execute his vengeance on rebellious sinners: hence, says the prophet, *before him went the pestilence: and burning diseases went forth at his feet.*

Our Lord being grown popular, and famed through the city of Capernaum, for the authority and eloquence of his teaching, and the manifold wonders which he

wrought, vast numbers of people resorted to him while he abode at Peter's house, and brought with him great numbers of sick persons, and those who were possessed with devils. The kind and compassionate Saviour of the world, was touched with pity at the sight of so many distressed and afflicted objects; when he immediately healed them all, and fulfilled, by his extensive all-relieving goodness, the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, *He himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.*

But the vast crowds of people, who now gathered about him in Capernaum, were not easily to be borne, and to avoid the troublesome press, our Redeemer retired to the desert, whither he was soon followed by great multitudes of people, who were so delighted with his instructions, and had conceived so high an opinion of him, from his kind condescension, and his many wonderful works, that they desired him never to depart from them. But this request being inconsistent with the nature of his ministry, and the great design of his coming into the world, he departed from the desert, *and preached in the synagogues of Galilee;* and after he had proceeded through various cities of that country, he returned to Capernaum.

When our great Redeemer was known to be returned to the city, he was soon surrounded by great multitudes of people; so that he was forced to retire into a ship, which being a little way from the shore, the divine instructor taught them from thence, while the attentive multitude crowded to the sea-side, and listened with great attention to his heavenly words.

When he had finished his discourse, he turned to Peter, who was the owner of the vessel, and advised him to launch out further from the shore, and let down his fishing net into the sea. Peter informed him of their unsuccessful toil during the night, but said at his command, they would let down their net, and make one

trial more. Accordingly, they cast into the water, and immediately found that their net had enclosed so prodigious a number of large fish, that it was in danger of breaking. Peter surprised at so strange a turn, and such an unexpected success, and knowing it must be produced by a supernatural power, fell down at JESUS's feet. *Depart from me*, said he, *for I am a sinful man, O Lord!* He was convinced, by this miracle, of the divinity of his master, and was at that time impressed with awe from a sense of his own unworthiness: but the all-gracious Saviour of mankind bid him banish his fears, and informed him, that henceforth himself and his companions should be engaged in more noble employments. Our Lord declared that they should catch men, meaning, that they should be made instrumental in turning them from darkness to light, and from sin and Satan to the knowledge of God.

This miracle was considered, by the disciples of CHRIST, as a fuller and plainer manifestation of his divine power, and a clearer evidence of his being the Son of God, than those they had seen him perform in Capernaum and the adjacent country. It was the common opinion amongst the Jews, that good men, by their prayers, might prevail so far with the almighty Governor of the world, as to heal the sick and cast out devils; but they concluded that the creatures inhabiting the elements of the air or water, were subject only to the commands of our great Creator: and as he never granted to man an authority over these, the miracle which our Saviour had just wrought, proved him to be the Son of God, and the great Messiah; and accordingly this manifestation of divine power, fully convinced the disciples of the divinity of their master, and all they, without hesitation, joined in the resolution to follow him through the world.

CHAPTER XII.

CHRIST *cleanseth a second leper: He rebukes the storm and calms the sea: He casteth out the Legion of Devils, and suffereth them to enter into a Herd of Swine: He cures a person who had long been afflicted with the Palsy: And calls Matthew who was sitting at the Receipt of Custom.*

THE disciples now having every scruple removed, and being fully convinced that their master was the Messiah, left their employment and followed him, while according to his usual custom, he went through various cities of Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and confirming his divine doctrines, with the most astonishing miracles.

In one of the cities which he visited on this occasion, he found a man, said by the evangelist, to be *full of leprosy, who seeing Jesus, fell on his face and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean.* It was the custom of the priests in Judea to drive from the conversation of mankind, those persons who were infected with the contagious kind of leprosy; and as this person was permitted to dwell in the city, it may be supposed that his leprosy was not of the worst kind. His case however, excited the compassion of our great Redeemer, who immediately cleansed him, and commanded him to depart to Jerusalem, and shew himself to the priest, and offer the customary gifts; but not publish abroad the account of his cure, nor make any noise about it. But the blessing which the poor man had received, was so great and unexpected, that his heart was so full of gratitude and joy, that he could not contain it; and he published the great things which our Lord had done for him, to all men where ever he came. This brought such crowds of people to the Son of God, that he was obliged to

depart from Capernaum into the wilderness, where he spent some time in retirement, meditation, and prayer.

Some writers have supposed that this leper, and the other mentioned in the foregoing chapter, were one and the same person; but this must be a mistake, the former being cleansed in the fields, the latter in the city: after cleansing the first, JESUS went to Capernaum and healed the centurion's servant; after curing the latter, JESUS retired into the wilderness, to shun the vast multitudes which soon gathered round him, from the leper being so careful to proclaim to all men the miracles which JESUS had wrought.

Perhaps it may seem strange that the blessed JESUS should be so careful to conceal his wondrous works, and be looked upon in some measure contrary to the end for which they were performed, which must certainly be to prove his divine mission. But it may be observed, that his modesty and humility would not allow his works to have the least appearance of ostentation; nor the Jews to have the least pretence of accusing him of seeking his own glory, or aiming at popular applause.

And it may be supposed that our great Redeemer did not think it proper, at this time, to irritate the Scribes and Pharisees by the proclamation and publication of his miracles through the kingdom. He very well knew that at the appointed time they would perform whatever had been determined, concerning him in the councils of heaven. In the mean time, he was to work the works of him that sent him, and proclaim his gospel amongst mankind. This he knew could not be so conveniently performed if the fame of his miracles had roused the rage of his enemies, and excited their malice and envy to exert their utmost power against him. He likewise was sensible of the unruly humour of the multitude; they were convinced that he was the Messiah; they had no further views than

a temporal reign; and he might be apprehensive that they would *come by force, and make him king*, if the fame of his miracles blazed abroad before he had informed them of the spiritual nature of his kingdom. If such were his views, there was the greatest necessity to keep his miracles concealed as much as possible. The fame of his cleansing the last leper had brought such numbers of people to Capernaum, that he was forced to retire into a solitary retreat in the neighbouring desart: nor could he even in this retirement long enjoy the repose he sought; for the people soon found out the place of his retreat and flocked to him in great numbers from every part of the country.

Our Lord finding his endeavours to conceal himself in the wilderness would be in vain, he ordered his disciples to accompany him to the other side of the lake. A certain Scribe, who happened to be amongst the company, declared that he would follow him whithersoever he went; JESUS, who well knew that his only desire was to gain the profits and honor of that temporal kingdom which he supposed the Messiah would establish, told him, that if he wanted nothing more than to advance and improve his worldly fortune, he would be greatly deceived; for the blessed Jesus informed this teacher of Israel, *That the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*

The Son of Man is a name by which the Messiah is called in the prophecy of Daniel, where his wide and extensive dominion is described; and therefore when this title is applied to our Lord, it hath reference to his human nature, and at the same time conveys an idea of that glorious kingdom to which his manhood will be exalted. But as it was also a name by which the old prophets were called by way of contempt, it is used in several places to express the deep humiliation of the Son of God.

The disciples having provided a ship, took their Master on board, and crossed the lake, being followed by several boats full of people, who were desirous of hearing his heavenly discourse, and seeing the wonderful works which he constantly performed. Our Lord, being fatigued with the labour of the day, fell asleep in the ship, while she smoothly glided along the level seas.

But soon the weather, which till now had been calm and serene, changed, black clouds covered the skies, and the big storm burst from the dark concave of heaven, the winds roared aloud, and the white foam appeared on the face of the waves; the ship could scarce bear the dashing tides which beat incessantly against her; the darkness of the night increased the horrors of the tempest; the waves began to break over the ship, and she was in the utmost danger of sinking. All hopes of being saved were lost, and in the agonies of despair the disciples ran to JESUS, crying, *Master, Master, we perish!* This pitious exclamation awakened him from his sleep, and raising that hand, so often employed in acts of benevolence and mercy, he with an awful all-commanding voice, rebuked the boisterous ocean. The elements knew his voice; the roaring winds forsook the seas; and the foaming waves subsided. All was quiet, all was still and the ship smoothly cut the smiling deep, soon arriving at her destined port.

The disciples, before this, had seen our Lord perform many miracles, and had abundant reason to rely on his power and goodness. They had certainly no cause to be so much affrighted, or to give way to such despair and terror: they might have considered, that the same divine person who had so often healed the sick, and had lately shewn such power over the watery element, as to bring the fish to their nets, was equally able to stay the wild waves, or to have preserved them alive, had the ship sunk beneath them: but they seemed,

in the hurry of mind consequent on the terrors of the storm, to have forgot the power of their master, and therefore he gently rebuked them, *Why are ye so fearful! How is it that ye have no faith?* They ought to have remembered likewise, that the voyage was undertaken at his command, and it was not to be feared that he would permit them to perish: but when the terror of the storm was over, they wondered at his power, and though they frequently had occasion to remark the effects of his heavenly goodness, they exclaimed, *What manner of man is this! that even the winds and the sea obey him.*

Soon after the storm was stilled, the ship arrived in the country of Gadara; and on their landing, two men possessed with devils, came to meet our Redeemer. They were both exceeding fierce, turbulent and unruly; but one of them was more furious than the other: this person had often been bound with chains and fetters, but all in vain, for his fetters were always broken with the greatest fury, so that no man attempted any longer to restrain him; being therefore at full liberty, he shunned all human society, and wandered day and night, in desert and dry places, and amongst the sepulchres and tombs, filling the silent repositories of the dead, with the most dismal and horrid howlings, and sometimes tearing his flesh, and cutting himself with stones.

The disciples were very much alarmed and terrified at the approach of these horrid and furious beings, but JESUS soon quieted their apprehensions of danger, by commanding the devils to come out of the men, while they were at some distance The heavenly command had no sooner passed from the lips of our great Redeemer, than the men fell on their faces crying, *What have we to do with thee Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time? I adjure, thee by God, that thou torment us not.* The infernal spirits were not ignorant of the power of

the Son of God, and were afraid, that he would cast them immediately into the torments prepared for them, and suffer them no longer to wander about the earth, which they seem to have hoped would be permitted them, till the judgment of the great day.

Jesus, being willing that the torment of these miserable men should be the more understood, asked one of the dæmons his name, who immediately answered, *my name is Legion, for we are many:* at the same time, he humbly requested, that our Lord would not immediately cast them into the ultimate torments prepared for them in the great deep of bottomless perdition, but would permit them to enter into an herd of swine, then feeding on a neighbouring mountain.

The grand deceiver of mankind, no doubt, beheld with gnawing envy, the effects of our Redeemer's power and goodness; and to abate the opinion which the inhabitants of Gadara might form of him, and make him odious in their view, seems to be the reason of his petition to enter into the swine; for doubtless the Devil knew, that if his legion could gain this permission, it would be in their power to destroy them; but though his secret designs could not be hid from the Saviour of the world, yet our Lord was pleased to grant to the fiend, the permission he desired: perhaps this might be complied with, to give the disciples a full proof that these persons were really possessed with devils, and to give a terrible instance of the power of these malicious beings when free from restraint.

The commission was no sooner granted, than the devils forsook the men, and swift as lightning, seized their bristly prey. The whole herd were immediately in a tumult, and the torments the poor creatures suffered, were plainly perceived by the spectators at a distance; the keepers were affrighted, and found it impossible to calm or restrain the wild fury of the herd; they poured, with amazing rapidity,

down the mountain's side, and approaching the confines of the lake, leaped from the rocks and precipices into the sea, and the whole herd *perished in the waters*. The persons, who but a moment before, were roaring, raving, and cutting themselves, were now become calm and composed; they were become mild and gentle, having recovered the use of their reason, and being now proper members of society, they, doubtless, believed in the Son of God.

The keepers of the herd, astonished at this surprising event, ran into the city, in the utmost terror and amazement, and related the cure of the men who had been possessed with devils, and the destruction of the swine. This wonderful report threw the whole city into the utmost consternation, and the inhabitants in crowds, left their houses, to be spectators of the strange event. They saw the men sitting at the feet of JESUS, and in their right minds; but as they were conscious of having committed a trespass against the law of Moses, by keeping such numbers of swine, which were strictly forbid to be eaten, they were afraid, and seemed to expect some severer judgment: they might have been convinced of the goodness and compassion of the great person who had performed these wonders, by the cure of the men; but they were afraid, and meekly besought our Lord to depart from their country.

The stupid Gadarenes, had they known how great a benefit they might have received by attending on the illustrious person who had worked such wonders amongst them, would not have been so cruel to themselves, as to have presented such a petition. It is true they had lost their swine, but had received two of their countrymen and fellow creatures: these happy men were delivered from the power of the Devil, and their country was freed from so intolerable a burden; and the benefit they might have received to their souls, by attending on our great Redeemer and hearing his

words, would have been of greater value than the *cattle on a thousand hills.*

The blessed JESUS, however thought fit to comply with the request of the foolish Gadarenes, and soon returned to the country from whence he came. The persons who were happily delivered from the power of the Devil, desired to accompany him, but our Lord ordered them to remain in their own country, as a standing monument of his divine power and goodness: *Go home to thy friends*, said our exalted Redeemer to one of them, *and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*

It may be remarked on this miracle, that here we have a fuller display of the tyranny and power of the Devil, than in any other part of Scripture; and therefore it is fit to be recommended, to the serious attention of those infidels, who, like the Sadducees, will not believe in the existence of spirits, and scoff at the power of the Devil. Let such persons behold the picture of these unhappy men possessed by the devil, as drawn by the evangelists: they were driven from their abodes, and from the society of men; one of them was so fierce that he could not be confined, but broke chains of iron like a burnt thread, and fetters like rotten wood; he frequented the most solitary places, and filled the desert with more dreadful howlings, than the wild beasts; he dwelt amongst the tombs, and abode in the dismal and solitary mansions of the dead, forlorn and naked, crying out day and night, cutting himself with stones, and tearing his own flesh.

If such person would give themselves time to consider this dreadful representation of human misery, surely their scoffs would be changed into compassion for these unhappy creatures, and fearful apprehensions for themselves; surely they would no longer scoff at the power of the Devil, nor the pains of eternal dam-

nation. It would certainly be more worthy the superior wisdom they boast of, to be cautious and diffident; they are men, and surely they will allow that it is possible they may be mistaken: and when their eternal interest is at stake, one would think they might condescend to consider. But if they will deride, and still persist in their unbelief, a short space of time will convince them of their fatal error; and dreadful experience force them to confess the greatness of the tyranny, and the bitterness of the malice, of this prince of darkness, against the souls of men. May they see the error of their conduct, and be enabled, by the Divine Spirit, sincerely to repent of their evil thoughts, and perverse ways, and seek the things which belong to their eternal peace.

The blessed JESUS, with his disciples, being landed in Galilee, he soon repaired to Capernaum; no sooner was his arrival known, than great multitudes resorted to him; the house where he was could not contain them, nor even the court before the door.—He preached the doctrines and duties of his gospel to the listening throng, amongst whom were many Pharisees and doctors of the law, whom the fame of his miracles had brought from distant countries to behold his person, and hear his words.

He not only, by his preaching, represented the great precepts and principles of his religion, in a plain and striking point of light, but worked such miracles amongst them, as were sufficient to convince every judicious, unprejudiced, and impartial enquirer after truth, of his divine mission; and he proved himself to be the Son of God, by those illustrious and benevolent actions, which God only could perform.

Amongst many other instances of his almighty power and God-like benevolence, was that of his restoring a person to perfect health, who had long been afflicted with the palsy, and was reduced by that deplorable disorder, to the most melancholy and distressful

condition: he was unable to move any member of his body, and was become an helpless bundle of misery and distress. In this deplorable condition, he was carried in his bed, with design to have petitioned our Lord to take pity on his distress, and exert that healing power, for which he was so remarkable in his relief. The multitudes who surrounded our Lord, had filled the house, and pressed so close, that it was impossible to bring the sick person into his presence. The persons that carried this miserable object, perceiving the difficulty which attended their design, took the lame man to the top of the house, lying in his bed. The houses in Judea had flat roofs, with battlements round them, according to the command of the law, Deut. xxii. 8. On these roofs there was a kind of trap-door, by which they came up from the house upon the roof, where they spent a considerable part of the day. It was also common to have a flight of stairs from the garden to the roof of the house, by which the persons who carried the sick must be supposed to have ascended. When they came to the roof, they found the door shut: but being resolved, if possible, to compass their design, they uncovered the roof, and by ropes let down the sick of the palsy, lying on his bed, into the midst of the company before JESUS. Our Redeemer seeing the faith of the friends of the afflicted person, had compassion on him, and spake aloud, *Son be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.*

These words gave great offence to the Scribes and Pharisees, who said in their hearts, *This man speaketh blasphemy;* for he takes to himself that which belongs only to his maker. *Who can forgive sins but God only?* They were ignorant of the high dignity of the person who pronounced the words, and they murmured against him in their hearts. But JESUS, who knew what passed in the inmost recesses of their minds, was willing to let them understand that he was endued with the Spirit of God; and to convince them that he knew their thoughts, he said unto them, *Why think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is it easier*

to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, take up thy bed and walk? By these words our Lord might have convinced them that he had really a right to forgive sins; for certainly it must be easier to forgive sins, than to remove the punishment which is inflicted on men for sin. As therefore it was apparent our Lord had power to perform the latter, why should it be questioned whether he had a right to pronounce the former; but these haughty teachers of Israel cherished a gloomy rancour in their hearts, and, frowning, held their peace. Our Lord then turned to the diseased person, and said, *Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.*

No sooner had our great Redeemer spoken these words than the diseased person was perfectly restored to his former health and strength; and, to the astonishment of the surrounding multitude, arose, took up his bed, and departed to his own house, praising and glorifying God; while the affected beholders, with the highest acclamations, joined the praise, and glorified the God of Israel, *who had given such power unto man*; but the Scribes and Pharisees, however confounded they were at the miracle, still persisted in their unbelief; an instance which should fill us with the most serious thoughts, as it demonstrates that a pride of heart, which produces an haughty self-sufficiency, and generates an obstinate and determined hatred and opposition to the truth, and by suspending and stupifying all the noble powers of the soul, operates like the palsy of the mind, is a much more dreadful and deplorable disease than the palsy of the body.

Our adorable Redeemer having performed this miracle, departed to the sea-side; and a multitude of people gathering about him, he made use of the favourable opportunity to enlighten their dark minds with the rays of heavenly truth. What were the particular points he chose, the evangelists have not informed us; but we may safely conclude that these discourses, like

the rest delivered by this divine person, were worthy of God and advantageous to man.

Our blessed Saviour having finished his discourse, he returned to the city of Capernaum, and going by the quays where the goods which were brought by sea from various nations were landed, he saw Matthew, a rich publican, sitting in his office to receive the customs. Matthew is sometimes in the gospels called Levi, and was the son of Alpheus. CHRIST no sooner saw him than he called him. *Follow me*, was his mild and gracious language; which the heavenly teacher had no sooner spoken, than the wealthy publican felt a divine power warm his heart, which overpowering every worldly consideration, he seems to have left his accounts all unfinished, and immediately obeyed. He soon, by our great Redeemer, was led into a more honourable and important employment, and afterwards became an evangelist, as well as an apostle.

A few days after this, the new called publican made a great entertainment, to which he, with CHRIST and his disciples, invited several of his own profession; no doubt hoping that his heavenly conversation might strike their hard hearts with remorse for their wickedness and extortion, and lead them in paths worthy of partaking the benefits arising from the glorious Redeemer of mankind. In the course of the entertainment CHRIST reminded them that in the gospel dispensation, God *will have mercy, and not sacrifice;* and as those who confessed themselves sinners were the only proper objects of that mercy, our Lord declared that he was *not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance;* and to blame him for conversing with publicans and sinners was as great a piece of absurdity as to blame a physician for visiting the sick. This declaration from the great friend and Redeemer of lost sinners, dissatisfied greatly the haughty, self-conceited Scribes and Pharisees: and as they made great ostentation of their fasting and abstinence, they took

this opportunity to give themselves consequence on that account; and joining with John's disciples, presumed to blame our great Redeemer because his disciples were not so frequent in this practice as themselves. To this our Lord replied, that the present was not a time for fasting, for his disciples need not fast and mourn in the presence of their master, any more than the friends of the bridegroom need fast and afflict themselves while they enjoyed his company. *But*, said he, *the day will come, when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they shall fast.* Intimating by this, that the calamities, troubles and afflictions which they would suffer after the death of their master, would oblige them to fast and mourn; but the corrupt nature of man, which was the cause of his coming into the world, required different treatment; the rent would not be patched up with mortification, fasting or any external performances; such treatment as this would be like sewing a piece of new cloth on an old rotten garment, which would only make the rent worse; or putting new wine into old leather bottles, which would burst as soon as the liquor fermented:

CHAPTER XIII.

CHRIST *healeth a Woman of an inveterate issue of Blood: Raises Jairus's Daughter from the Dead: Gives Sight to two blind Men: Delivered a possessed Person from the evil Spirit: And, returning to Galilee, chooses his twelve Apostles out of his Disciples: Then, repairing to Capernaum, cures the Centurion's Servant.*

WHILE the blessed JESUS was disputing with the Scribes and Pharisees in the house of Matthew, whom he had lately called into the number of his disciples, an afflicted father, in all the agonies of distress, hastily pressed into his presence. This was Jairus, the ruler of the Jewish synagogue in Capernaum, and the cause of his present affliction was the dangerous illness of his daughter, who lay at the point of death.

Having earnestly implored the assistance of our great Redeemer in this distressing case, the Lord of life graciously condescended to comply with his request, and accordingly accompanied the distressed father to his house; and great multitudes of people, who were desirous of beholding the miracles of Christ, crowded around and pressed to behold what the divine Instructor would do on this great occasion.

But as they passed through the streets of the city, the attention of the surrounding multitudes were turned to a woman, who came behind the Son of God, and touched the hem of his garment. This woman had been afflicted twelve years with a terrible disorder, which had baffled the force of medicine. She had spent her whole substance on physicians, but could obtain no relief; but hearing of the miracles performed by the blessed JESUS, she was so fully convinced of his divine power, that she concluded if she could but touch his clothes she should be made whole. Nor was

she deceived, for she no sooner touched the border of the garment of our great Redeemer, than the issue of blood dried up; and she felt such a flow of vital spirits, and uncommon gladness warm her heart, that she was fully convinced that she had received a cure.

The blessed JESUS, who knew the hearts of all men, was not ignorant of the minutest circumstances attending this affair; he knew the woman's thoughts, and was pleased with her faith: and with design to begin a conversation in which he might testify his approbation, he turned about and asked who touched him? His disciples, as they were not apprized of the transaction, wondered at their Master's question. *Thou seest*, said they, *the multitude thronging and pressing thee, and sayest thou who touched me?* JESUS, however, persisted in the inquiry, and the woman, perceiving she could not be concealed, came to him trembling, and told him what she had done. She approached him with hesitation and diffidence, fearing he would be offended at the liberty she had taken; but the divine Physician received her with condescending goodness, spake to her in the kindest manner, and commended her faith; *Daughter*, said he, *be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole.*

In the midst of the surprise occasioned by this miracle, a messenger approached from Jairus's house, and informed him that his daughter was dead, so that he need not give our Lord the trouble to come any further; for they supposed it far beyond the power of this extraordinary person to overcome the mighty conqueror Death, or recall the fleeting spirit from the eternal world. This message was received by the affectionate parent with the strongest emotions of sorrow, and bitterest agonies of distress. Our Lord took compassion on him, and desired him to be comforted with hopes, that his daughter should be restored.

When our great Redeemer came to the ruler's house

he found it full of mourners, who made great lamentation, and were preparing for the funeral. Our Lord commanded them to cease their preparations; *for*, said he, *the maid is not dead, but sleepeth: and they laughed him to scorn.* These words of CHRIST were used with peculiar propriety, to denote that it was determined the virgin should not continue in the cold embraces of death, but should instantly be restored to her friends as one awakened out of sleep; and having thus spoken, our Lord approached the apartment of the dead, taking with him none but Peter, James, and John, except the father and mother of the maiden: then laying hold of the cold hand of the dead virgin, he said with a gentle voice, *Maid, arise!* The heavenly voice was immediately obeyed, and the damsel arose fresh as from a sound sleep, all healthful and vigorous; and JESUS commanded to give her something to eat.

Thus the great Son of God gave a full and clear manifestation of his heavenly power: and not only proved that he was the true Messiah, but gave a clear demonstration of the possibility of the resurrection of the dead: and those who have imbibed the absurd opinion of the soul's sleeping with the body till the resurrection, would do well to consider the expression of the evangelist, *Her spirit came again.* Luke viii. 55: by which it appears that the soul exists in a state of separation, when the body lies all cold and breathless in the dark chambers of the grave.

Having performed this great and benevolent miracle, our blessed Saviour left the ruler's house; and going through the streets of the city, he was followed by two blind men; they had, doubtless, heard of the great miracle which he had just performed, and supplicated his assistance in their present deplorable circumstances, well knowing that he was able to restore them to sight. The benevolent Saviour of sinners condescended to favour their request; and having entered an house to escape the crowding of the multitude, he

touched their eyes, and said, *According to your faith be it unto you;* when immediately the great and desirable blessing of sight was restored unto them; the sacred beams of all-chearing day revisited their eyes, and filled their hearts with gladness, and their tongues with praise; and such a flood of gratitude and joy overflowed their hearts, that they could not conceal their miraculous restoration to sight, though our Lord required them to keep silence, but published our Redeemer's fame and their own happy condition, through every part of the country.

The men who had thus miraculously received their sight, being departed, the multitude brought to the benevolent Saviour of Sinners a dumb man, possessed with a devil. So affecting a case attracted the compassionate regard of the blessed JESUS, who immediately cast out the foul spirit. The dumb man instantly recovered the use of speech, and spake in so sensible and satisfactory a manner, that the whole multitude were amazed, and, declared that such wondrous works were never wrought by the greatest and most eminent of the ancient prophets, *It was*, said they, *never so seen in Israel.*

The Pharisees whose hearts were full of infernal rancour, and whose pride and prejudice prevented their receiving instruction from the discourses, or conviction from the miracles of our great Redeemer, beheld the miracle now performed with a scornful sneer, and put the most invidious construction upon it, that could possibly enter into the heart of man: *He casteth out Devils*, said they, *through the prince of the Devils.* The blessed JESUS, seems, at this time, to have taken no notice of this calumny: but leaving the haughty, self-conceited doctors, under the dominion of their blindness, and prejudice, he proceeded in the prosecution of the duties of his mission, and exerted himself more and more in the great work of promoting the cause of truth, and enlightening and instructing mankind.

Accordingly, leaving Capernaum, he took a tour through the adjacent country, bringing happiness and peace to the sons of misery and distress, *visiting all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness, and every disease amongst the people.*

At his return to Galilee, he was surrounded by vast multitudes of people, who expressed an earnest desire to hear his instructions, and learn the way of truth and happiness from his lips. This tractable disposition of mind engaged the attention of the great Redeemer of sinners, and filled his heart with compassion for them, in their present deplorable state of blindness and ignorance, and excited him to exert his divine power for their relief. Indeed the state of the Jewish nation at this time was worthy of compassion; for, with respect to spiritual things, the common people might justly be compared to sheep without a shepherd. The Scribes, Pharisees, and Lawyers, who ought to have instructed them, were blind, lazy guides, and their teaching tended rather to lead them aside from the paths of truth and righteousness, than to afford them any real advantage: their teaching tended rather to magnify and exalt themselves than promote the knowledge or worship of their maker; and to encourage a scrupulous exactness in external ceremonial performances, rather than promote the cause of truth, purity, and virtue. In this dark and forlorn condition, our Lord had compassion on the multitude, and, in his divine wisdom and benevolence, proceeded to take proper measures for their relief. He always regarded the seed of Israel with peculiar affection; and as they were wandering on the dark mountains of error and superstition, without any to restrain their wanderings, or teach their steps to find the way of peace, he recommended their case to his disciples, and commanded them to approach the throne of God, with earnest prayers in their behalf: *The harvest*, said he, *truly is plenteous, but the labour-*

ers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Nor did our great Redeemer recommend this affecting case to his disciples, without employing his own most powerful intercession with his heavenly Father: for he ascended a mountain, and continued all night in prayer to God. Having spent the night in earnest supplication, the morning no sooner returned, than he set about the important task of divine instruction. To this end, he chose twelve out of the number of his disciples, and named them apostles, *to be always with him, that he might send them forth to preach.* These were Simon Peter, and Andrew, his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew; James the son of Alpheus, and Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot. These twelve having been constant attendants on our Lord, having learnt his heavenly doctrine, and seen his wondrous works, and being fully qualified to preach to the world, those divine truths, which themselves had received, were sent out to preach the gospel of the kingdom; but commanded not to enter into any city of the Samaritans, or of the Gentiles, but confine themselves to the land of Israel, and to proclaim through the nation, that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* They were also provided with miraculous power to prove the truth of their doctrine, and manifest to the world, that they came from God, and were commanded to exert those divine powers with unremitting ardour, for the advantage of mankind. The command of their divine Master, was to *heal the sick; cleanse the lepers; raise the dead; cast out devils; freely,* said he, *ye have received, freely give.* And that they might be sensible of the care of their heavenly Father, over the most minute circumstances which concerned them, they were enjoined to make no provision for their journey, nor take any care about temporal things: *Provide,*

said their divine Master, *neither gold nor brass in your purses, nor script for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, neither yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.*

Probably the apostles, knowing that the whole Jewish nation was elated with the apprehension of the appearance of the Messiah, and the high expectations they had formed of his setting up a temporal kingdom, might expect to be received with honor and esteem by their countrymen, as they were going to publish the speedy approach of that kingdom which they so ardently desired, and to work such miracles, as might convince them that their declaration was true: but their master informed them, that the event, in this case, would not be answerable to their expectation; for, instead of being caressed and honoured by their countrymen, he assured them, they should meet with derision and contempt: he informed them they should be despised and persecuted, delivered to the rulers, and punished as wicked men. But, at the same time, he promised them the constant protection and assistance of his heavenly Father, and gave them minute and particular instructions for their behaviour on every occasion; and let them know, that whoever rejected them and their message, should be rejected and treated with indignation and scorn, by the great Judge of the world: but those who received them with kindness, attended to their preaching and received it with honesty and openness of mind, kindly contributing to their support, though they gave but a cup of cold water, to the least of his disciples, should not fail of receiving a large reward.

The apostles having received this commission, visited all parts of the country, preaching the doctrine of repentance and proclaiming the kingdom of the Messiah at hand. They confirmed the truth of their declarations, by working of miracles, healing the sick, and performing every great work which was worthy

their master's cause, and necessary to prepare the minds of mankind to receive him; while our great Redeemer continued the course of his ministry in Galilee, and by the divine eloquence of his preaching, and the wonders he wrought proved himself to be the Son of God.

In the eye of worldly wisdom, it must seem a very foolish and unpopular attempt to send a parcel of illiterate, despised Galileans to reform the world: how was it possible, that such persons as these, should confound the wisdom of the wise, and baffle the power of the mighty? How was it possible, that they should overturn the many false religions which then flourished in the world, which were supported by civil government, and had established themselves by long continuance, were deep-rooted in the human heart, and maintained by the passions, prejudices, and interest of mankind. Had human prudence directed to the choice of persons to be employed on this great occasion, they doubtless would have been men of great learning, superior eloquence, and possessed of every art of persuasion and address. But the wisdom of God stoops not to be directed by the wisdom of man: his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. When his glorious gospel was sent to enlighten and enrich the world, this divine treasure was committed to earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might appear to be a God: accordingly, it appeared that the religion which these illiterate firshermen, these despised Galileans published through the world, was far superior, was more worthy of God, and beneficial to man, than the accutest reasonings or the sublimest strains of the Greek and Roman philosophers and poets, though they were furnished with all the stores of human literature, and spent their whole time in [illegible] and contemplation. Hence, it is manifest, that the glorious gospel of God, by its noble simplicity, its own intrinsic dignity and worth, as well as by the miraculous power which attended it, and the

heavenly glory which shone around it, proved itself to be wholly original and divine.

Nor was the success which attended the attempts of these weak and despised instruments wanting to prove the divine original of the doctrine they taught: while the tenets of the philosophers were confined to their respective schools, the glorious gospel spreads over the world, and was received in every country, and by men of every station; it was received by the bulk of mankind, with the highest satisfaction, and the sublimest joy: as something necessary to their supreme good, which hitherto they had been seeking in vain. It was, therefore, the highest wisdom which conducted the propagation of the gospel, and made use of such low and contemptible persons; for hence it plainly appeared, that these noble truths were not of human invention, but were the production of Infinite Wisdom, and were first advanced, and are still supported, by the mighty power of God.

After our great Redeemer had appointed his twelve apostles, he came down from the mountain, and was joyfully received by multitudes of people, who were waiting for him in the plain: and such was the heavenly virtue which attended and surrounded him, that whoever touched the border of his garment, was healed of his disease. This is sufficient to account for the great numbers of people which daily followed this illustrious person, who crowded around him, wherever he went, and accompanied him to the remotest part of the wilderness of Judea; nor was it only the vulgar and necessitous that pursued our Redeemer's steps wheresoever he went, but persons of high rank and character, came from the remotest parts to converse with him, hear his divine doctrine, and be spectators of his wondrous works, and partakers of the benefits resulting from them.

After healing the sick amongst the multitudes, he

proceeded to instruct them, and delivered a divine discourse, in substance nearly the same as that which he before preached from the mountain: the chief difference in these discourses, is the threatnings which are here denounced against particular sinners, whereas the discourse recorded by St. Matthew, contains only blessings. It may not be amiss, briefly to consider these maledictions, as a large paraphrase hath been given on the former sermon.

Woe unto you that are rich, said our exalted Saviour, *for you have received your consolation.* Riches in this world are no evidence of the love of God, but are frequently bestowed on the worst of men; they are not bestowed upon any as a reward for superior degrees of moral goodness, but are distributed by the great governor of the universe, so as to answer the wise ends of his own government, and bring about his great designs; they have no tendency to promote the best interest of man, but are frequently made use of by the worst of men, to the worst of purposes, and enable them to be more extensively and desperately wicked: they are frequently a snare to the truly religious, and have a natural tendency to pervert the affections, and corrupt the heart. It requires great grace to keep them from degrading the soul, and generating a low, mean, worldly spirit; for, wherever the natural course and tendency of riches prevail, it will always remain an eternal truth, that *it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

Woe unto you that laugh, for ye shall mourn and weep. It is not a joyful, cheerful, thankful frame of spirit, which our Lord here exclaims against, but a foolish, trifling levity of mind. The gospel of CHRIST, is particularly calculated to inspire a constant cheerfulness of temper, and Christians are commanded always to rejoice; the assurance they have of reconciliation with God, the lively hope of everlasting life,

the constant pleasure which they find in communion with God, and the contemplation on heavenly things, tend to fill the mind with solid satisfaction and substantial joy. This joy will be constantly increasing, as Christians advance in the divine life, and will be fully completed in the eternal world: but those giddy, gay sallies of mirth, and the thoughtless dissipation of mind which arises from an immoderate love of vain amusement and sensual pleasure, that gives no time for consideration, but scatters serious thoughts, and creates an utter aversion to sober reflection, will soon lead the soul into such a labyrinth of wretchedness and woe, that they shall then mourn and weep.—This will certainly be their lot in this world, when their vain delusive gratifications can please no more; and it will eternally be their lot, when they will be deprived of every gleam of hope and comfort, and consigned to the dark regions of sorrow and despair, *where will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

But our great Redeemer added, *Woe unto you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers of the false prophets.* This malediction of our blessed Saviour, is denounced against those teachers who, for fear of offending men, shall keep back the truth of God, and fear to proclaim the unpopular and humbling truths of the gospel, which are so mortifying to human pride, and by flattering the vices, and humouring the pride and passions of men, shall gain their commendation and applause. Such teachers as these, are compared to the false prophets of old, who by humouring the vanity and flattering the pride of princes and great men, were more caressed and attended to than the true prophets of God.

When our great Redeemer had finished his discourse, he departed to Capernaum, and was met by some messengers from a Centurion, who desired him to come and heal a servant whom he highly esteemed, that was sick, and in danger of death. This Centu-

rion, from the character given him by the evangelist, seems to have been a proselyte to the Jewish religion. The inhabitants of Capernaum spake much in his favour, and strongly recommended his case; for they said, that *he was a lover of their religion, and had built them a synagogue.* The great Saviour of mankind, who went about doing good, graciously attended to the petition, and readily accompanied the messengers; but before he arrived at the house, he was met by a party of the Centurion's friends, who expressed the high conception which that officer had of the divine power of our Redeemer, and desired he would not give himself the trouble of a personal attendance, as his word would be abundantly sufficient to accomplish the cure. Our Lord was pleased with the message, and turning to the spectators, said, *I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,* Luke vii. 9. The persons having delivered their message, returned to the Centurion's house, and found the sick person perfectly recovered.

There are several circumstances attending this miracle, and that related by St. Matthew, which proves that this Centurion was not the same person. The Centurion mentioned by St. Matthew, attended on CHRIST in person; he whose case is last related, presented his petition by the elders of Capernaum. It does not appear that the former Centurion was a proselyte to the Jewish religion; but we find a very high character given of the latter: these and several other particulars which might have been mentioned prove that this miracle ough to be considered separate from the former.

This miracle being performed, our Lord repaired to the house of Peter, to eat bread; the place of his residence could not be concealed; great multitudes of people surrounded the house; some, no doubt, desiring to behold the wonders which he wrought, and

others, to be partakers of the benefit resulting from them; they continued there some time, advancing their respective claims, in a tumultuous manner, and it was with difficulty they were persuaded to disperse.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHRIST retires to Nain, a City of Galilee, where he raises a Widow's only Son from the Dead: He receives Messengers from John the Baptist, and gives his Testimony concerning him: After which he dines with Simon the Leper, where he is anointed by Mary, whose affection he acknowledges and rewards.

WHILE the apostles were proceeding through the several cities of Judea, executing the commission of their Divine Master, our great Redeemer was carrying on the work of his mission in Galilee; and when they had returned to our Lord, they accompanied him and his disciples to Nain, a city near mount Tabor, where he was followed by a great multitude of people. On their approaching the gate of the city, a scene of the most affecting affliction and distress presented itself to their view; *Behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.* What an affecting scene was this, and how was the affliction and distress of the mournful parent heightened by every circumstance which could make it the more bitter? A young man cut down, probably in his prime, and followed to the grave by his weeping parent. With slow and solemn steps, scarce able to bear up under the load of her woes, the mourning matron follows the dead to interment, attended by her affected friends and neighbours, who had strove in vain to comfort her for the loss of her only son; for the young man was *the only son of his mother,* on whom perhaps she depended for support; and to render her affliction to the last degree heavy and insupportable, *she was a widow.* With tender pity our great Redeemer beheld this daughter of affliction, and immediately exerted his divine power for relief. There was no need of any intercessor to prevail with the blessed JESUS to attend to such a case as this; his own compassion was sufficient to excite him to relieve her.

The evangelist informs us, that *when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her*, and gently approaching, he bid her forbear to weep. But so great was her loss, that it had opened all the sluices of sorrow, and it was in vain to bid her refrain from tears. Her husband was no more, and now she had lost her only son, the surviving image of his departed father, and the last hope of her afflicted soul. What comfort in the ordinary course of nature could be administered to this mournful widow? She had lost her husband; she had lost her son. What distress could be more overwhelming? What case could be more deplorable? And how natural is it to suppose that she should *refuse to be comforted;* and to determine to *go down to the grave with mourning*. Our Lord well knew the weight of her affliction and the heavy pressure of her present grief, and therefore used no arguments to comfort her; but approaching the corpse, he *touched the bier*. The funeral procession immediately stood still, and the whole train in silent expectation awaited the event: when that powerful voice, which one day the dead shall hear, and they that hear shall live, soon uttered these remarkable words, *young man, I say to thee arise*: no sooner had our great Redeemer spoke, but the joyful event followed: *he that was dead sat up, and began to speak, and he restored him to his mother*. With what emotions of joy must we suppose this mournful mother would receive her only son thus unexpectedly rescued from the cold arms of death! What a flood of tenderness would burst upon the soul, and with what gratitude and joy would she behold his great deliverer, who did not make any shew of this stupenduous miracle amongst the multitude of his followers, and the attendants on the funeral, but immediately delivered the revived young man to his late afflicted, but now wondering and rejoicing mother, as a testimony that this great work was wrought in compassion to her distress. The surrounding multitudes beheld this wonderful event with a mixture of astonishment, pleasure, holy awe, and fear; *and they glorified God*

saying, that a great prophet is arisen amongst us, and that God hath visited his people.

If we take a review of this miracle, we may observe that it is liable to no objection, and abundantly proves the exertion of divine power. It is to be observed that it was wrought in the open field amongst a vast number of spectators. A great number of the inhabitants of the city attended the funeral; they all bewailed the disconsolate state of the afflicted widow, and had the opportunity of being satisfied that the youth was really dead. The powerful word which called the dead man to life was delivered in an audible voice before all the company; and this was done at the gate of the city, a place of general resort; every one had the opportunity of satisfying themselves that the young man was really restored to life. There was no possibility of deception, nor room for objections of any kind; and this miracle, joined with the rest wrought by the same divine person, abundantly proves that he was the Son of God, and the Saviour of sinners.

The fame of the wonderful works which JESUS constantly performed, was rapidly proclaimed through the various cities of Judea, and by the disciples of John the Baptist carried to their master. This prophet, as we before related, was cast into prison by Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee. The cause of his imprisonment was the offence which that prince had taken at his boldly and freely blaming his conduct respecting his incestuous connection with the princess Herodias. John had now been confined above a year in prison, and as he was fully convinced that CHRIST was really the Messiah, and no doubt having imbibed the national expectation of the Jews, that the Messiah would set up a temporal kingdom, he perceived that things did not answer his expectation: for doubtless, he apprehended, that before this time CHRIST would have manifested himself, and made some advances towards his

taking the reins of government. He therefore sent two of his disciples to our great Redeemer, with this question, *Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?* We are not to suppose by this enquiry, that John entertained any hesitation or doubt, whether CHRIST was the true Messiah, or not; for it is to be observed, that throughout the whole course of his ministry, he had borne a regular and ample testimony to the truth of his divine mission: he had been convinced by a particular revelation from heaven, and by the descent of the Holy Ghost, in a visible form at CHRIST's baptism, that he was that divine person who was to come to be the Saviour of Israel; and accordingly he made it his constant care to dispose the Jews in general, and his own disciples in particular, to receive and reverence him as the Messiah, bearing witness concerning him that he was superior to himself, and holding him up to view as *the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.* It cannot therefore be supposed as before observed, that the Baptist entertained any scruples in his mind concerning our Lord's divinity; but his design seems to be to lead his disciples into an acquaintance with our great Redeemer, that by beholding his miracles, and hearing his divine conversation, their minds might be prepared to receive him; for it is not improbable to suppose, that the prophet John might have some expectations of his own approaching death.

Nor was the conviction of his disciples, perhaps, the only view which the prophet had in sending this message to our great Redeemer; it is to be supposed that, like the rest of his countrymen, he expected the Messiah to set up a temporal kingdom. Nor is this supposition derogatory to the dignity of a great prophet, since we are informed, that though John was *a prophet, and more than a prophet, the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he;* the meanest preacher of the everlasting gospel is greater than the Baptist, because he had the opportunity of being informed of

the spiritual nature of CHRIST's kingdom. As then, it is to be supposed, that great forerunner of our Redeemer ardently desired, and impatiently expected the appearance of his kingdom; and as the blessed JESUS had assumed no earthly honour or dignity, but every thing in the Jewish church and state continued the same; the Baptist might send this message gently to remind him of what was expected from him as the Redeemer of Israel.

The disciples of John brought this message from their master to the exalted Saviour of the world, while he was attending to the various distresses of the multitude which surrounded him, curing many of their infirmities, plagues, and evil spirits, and restoring sight to the blind. These miracles the disciples of John beheld, and having delivered their message, our Lord did not think proper to return them a direct answer, but referred them to the wonderful works they had now been observing, and ordered them to carry an account of these things to their master, as an answer to his inquiry: *go your way*, said he, *and tell John what things you have heard and seen, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them.*

But that the multitude, from the proposal of this question, might not form an unfavourable opinion of John the Baptist, our blessed Saviour at this time thought proper to place his character in the most favourable point of light. He commended him as a person of the most invincible courage, resolution and fortitude, who stood firm in the midst of trouble and affliction, and was not like *a reed shaken with the wind;* and praised him for his austere and mortified course of life, not *wearing soft raiment, like those in king's palaces*, but maintained a manly hardiness, and abhorred all luxury, effeminacy, and dissipation. Our great Redeemer then gave a full and clear testimony to

the prophetic office of the Baptist, and declared that he was the person referred to by the prophet Isaiah, in those remarkable words, *Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee:* and added, that this extraordinary person was that *Elias which*, the ancient prophets declared, *was to come.*

Our Lord having done justice to the character of his great forerunner, took occasion from thence to blame and rebuke the obstinacy and perverseness of the great men and high pretenders to religion amongst the Jews, who had rejected both his own and the Baptist's testimony. It seems, by the nature of CHRIST's rebuke, that the Scribes and Pharisees, who pretend to great fasting and mortification, thought themselves eclipsed, and with envious vexation beheld themselves outdone by the real austerity of the Baptist. His living in the desert, and shunning the company of men and the conveniencies of life, the coarseness of his cloathing, the abstemiousness and plainness of his diet, and the real severities he practised, they beheld with growing rancour, and not only represented them as imprudent and unnecessary, but proceeded so far as to declare him possessed with an apostate spirit: *For John came neither eating nor drinking; and ye say, He hath a devil.*

But though these bold pretenders to superior sanctity and mortification, could exclaim against the Baptist on account of the austerity of his life, it was manifest that it was envy and not reason which promoted their unbelief: for when CHRIST on the contrary, dwelt in cities, and conversed with mankind, enjoining no austerities nor mortification, they could make use of this conduct as a ground of reproach. *The son of man came eating and drinking:* though he could not by his most inveterate enemies be charged with any intemperance, or with encouraging it in others; yet these determined opposers of heavenly truth could say, *Be-*

hold a man, gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners! But, said our great Redeemer, *wisdom is justified of her children.*

He then proceeded to upbraid the several cities where his most wonderful works had been performed; they had enjoyed the opportunity of attending his heavenly discourses, and had been witness to his wonderful works; frequently had they seen him perform miracles which could not be disputed, but fully manifested the mighty power of God; they had often seen him perform wonders sufficient to have convinced the most ignorant and idolatrous nations, who were immersed in the depth of sensuality, and had imbibed the strongest prejudices against the truth: yet, so great was their obstinacy, they persisted in their unbelief, they persisted in their wickedness notwithstanding all he had done to convince and reform them. *Woe unto thee Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida!* said our great Redeemer, *for if the mighty works which have been done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And thou Capernaum, that art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works that have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.* Matt. xi. 21, &c.

After having, in the most awful, affecting, and awakening manner, pronounced such woes on these unbelieving and profligate cities, our great Redeemer concluded his discourse with these gracious and reviving words, *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* It is the Son of the eternal God, the Heir of all things, the almighty Judge of heaven and earth, who kindly condescends to address poor, lost, undone sinners in this affecting

language; having pronounced heavy woes on the rebellious race, whose haughty self-sufficiency, inveterate prejudice, pride and obstinacy, prevented their receiving the truth, the kind and condescending Saviour of sinners gives the most tender, heart-affecting invitation to the humble and penitent. Those who *labour and are heavy laden;* those who are conscious of their vileness and sinfulness, who are pressed with the weight of their iniquities; whose guilt lies upon them like an heavy burden, from the weight of which they ardently desire to be delivered, are here called upon and earnestly invited to come to the only person who is able to relieve them. It is not the great and noble; it is not the powerful, prosperous and happy; it is not the exulting sons of joy, but the poor, needy, and afflicted, who are labouring under a sense of sin, and burdened with the weight of their iniquities, who are thus invited to come to our great Redeemer. The great Maker of all things, the all-wise and all-powerful Preserver, the supreme Governor and Judge of the universe, graciously condescends to call unto, and with the utmost tenderness to invite poor, heavy-laden, burdened sinners to come; he does not call upon them to come with a design to punish their offences; he does not summon them to appear before his awful seat of judgment; he does not call them with a design to deride or expose their miseries; he does not call them with an intent to punish their offences, but with a design to release them from their afflictions, to release them from their burdens, to give them rest and peace, and make them eternally happy. *Come unto me,* says our great Redeemer, *all ye that labour and are heavy laden;* all you who are humbled under a sense of your iniquities; who see the dreadful condition to which you are reduced by your sins; who have been long groaning under the intolerable weight of your guilt, and panting for deliverance; but throughout the limits of the wide creation can find no refuge; no help, no deliverer. *Come unto me, look unto me and be saved;* trust in me as *mighty to save;* venture your all in my

hands, seek no other refuge, no other help, no other deliverer; but *come unto me and I will give you rest.* It is not my design to upbraid you with the vileness and folly of your conduct; it is not my design to enter into judgment with you and punish you for your iniquities, but to lead you into the paths of peace, truth and happiness: be not afraid to listen to my words and follow my directions, but with a full reliance on my power, wisdom, and goodness, *take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls: for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* Can there be a greater evidence of the corruption and depravity of the human heart than the coldness with which the degenerate sons of Adam, receive so tender, so affecting, and so important an invitation. The great Creator hath formed them with strong desires of happiness, and they toil out a weary life, in the eager pursuit of every appearance of good. They are lost in the pursuit, and instead of happiness, find themselves plunged in trouble, vexation and woe; they find themselves burdened with many griefs, but will not come to him who is only able to relieve them. What blindness, stupidity, and abominable pride possess the human heart, and excite it to reject the gracious calls and invitations of the only Saviour of sinners!

After our great Redeemer had finished his discourse, he was invited by one Simon a leper to go to his house and take some refreshment. The invitation he accepted, and accompanied him to his apartment, where, as he sat at meat, a woman whose course of life was known to have been loose and profligate, sat at his feet beholding him with the tenderest affection, and shed such floods of tears that they trickled down his feet, which according to the custom of the country were bare. She seeing that her tears had wet the feet of her beloved Lord, wiped them with her hair, frequently kissing them with the utmost tenderness and affection, and anointed them with precious ointment. It

was doubtless the sense of her former course of life, and a deep conviction of her crimes, which caused this woman to shed such a profusion of tears; and her love to the blessed JESUS arose from the benefit she had received from his heavenly discourses.

The custom, which then prevailed in the Eastern countries, of pouring fragrant oil on the heads of those guests on whom they designed to bestow peculiar and distinguished marks of honour, seems to have brought this woman to our Redeemer at this time; and it appears to have been her original intention to have poured the ointment on his head; but being deeply humbled under a sense of her unworthiness she could not approach her divine Instructor with so much freedom as to accomplish her first intention, but thought it more consistent with her humility and self-abasement to anoint only his feet.

The leper, who it seems was a Pharisee, had attentively observed the woman, and knowing her character, concluded that JESUS could not be a prophet. *This man*, said Simon to himself, *if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman that is that touched him; for she is a sinner.* And so full of pride and self-sufficiency was the man, that he was offended at, and was ready to rebuke the blessed JESUS for his deigning to take notice of and conversing with such contemptible characters: but our great Redeemer to convince him that he was a prophet, and that he knew not only the character of the woman who had touched him, but was acquainted with the thoughts of all who thought mean of him in their hearts, began a conversation with him on the very subject he had been revolving in his mind. He did not expose his folly to the company by openly relating the secret thoughts of his heart, and insisting on the absurdity of them, but with the utmost delicacy pointed out to Simon himself the unreasonableness of the conclusion he had formed. *Simon*, said, the blessed JESUS, *I have somewhat to say*

unto thee: there was a certain creditor which had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty; and when they had nothing to pay he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most. Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, thou hast rightly judged. Our divine Instructor then immediately applied this short parable to the cause of the woman, concerning whom the Pharisee had so unjustly reasoned in his heart. *Simon,* continued he, *seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment, Wherefore, I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.*

Our Saviour having thus, with great delicacy, rebuked the unjust and injurious suspicions of the Pharisees, and vindicated his own character, as well as the conduct of the woman, whose extraordinary kindness and tender affection were in no danger of losing their reward from one who enjoyed the fine feelings of human nature in their highest perfection, now addressed the woman with the soul-reviving news, that her sins were forgiven. But while her heart expanded with that holy gratitude and joy, which was inspired by the great declaration, the Pharisees beheld both our Redeemer and the woman with rancour, disdain, and sullen contempt: they could not endure the thought, that great sinners should be pardoned, and set on a level with themselves; nor could they be reconciled to the authority which our Redeemer had assumed; for being ignorant of his divinity, they concluded that he had infringed on the prerogative of the Almighty, who only had a right to pardon sins. But the great friend

of sinners, regardless of their malicious murmurs, confirmed his gracious words, by repeating his assurances to the woman, adding, that her faith had saved her, and bidding her depart in peace.

Some little time after this, our great Redeemer departed from Capernaum and travelled through some parts of Galilee, going *through every village, preaching and shewing the glad-tidings of the kingdom of God*, Luke viii. 1. And after this short tour he prepared to go to Jerusalem to eat the passover; this being the second feast of that kind since the commencement of his public ministry. In this journey, he was accompanied by several pious women, amongst whom were Joanna the wife of Herod's steward, Susanna, Mary Magdalene, and various others, who had been dispossessed of devils, or cured of dangerous and painful diseases; some amongst them were persons of wealth, and were willing not only to acknowledge the great benefits they had received, but to make such returns as Providence had put in their power, and, therefore, they freely *ministered to him of their substance.*

CHAPTER XV.

CHRIST, *being at Jerusalem at the Time of the passover, heals an impotent Man at the Pool of Bethsaida on the Sabbath-day: He healeth one possessed with a Devil, who was blind and dumb: He sheweth that Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is an unpardonable Sin: and sheweth whom he regardeth as his nearest Relations. He alledgeth Scripture in excuse of his Disciples, whom the Pharisees charged with breaking the Sabbath in plucking the Ears of Corn on the Sabbath-Day: He appealeth to reason, and healeth the withered Hand on the Sabbath-Day.*

NEAR the temple in Jerusalem was a pool of water, into which ran the blood of the sacrifices, and the water which was used by the priests in preparing the victims, and on other occasions. This pool was called in the Hebrew tongue *Bethsaida*, that is *the house of mercy*. It was surrounded by five porches, or cloisters, and these were filled with *a great multitude of impotent folks, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season and troubled the water: whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.* The account of this miraculous pool is given us by the evangelist John, but is not mentioned by any more of the sacred writers: and various questions have arisen concerning these wonderful waters, which it hath been impossible to resolve, because the pool of Bethsaida is not mentioned by any other Jewish writer, sacred or profane.

For the above reasons, it cannot be precisely determined, when this miraculous power of healing first appeared in this pool: but it is almost universally agreed, that it could not be long before the coming of our Redeemer; and that the miracle was intended to

lead to the Son of God, and to prepare the nation for the reception of him. Nor is it strange, that a healing virtue should attend those waters, which were stained with the blood of the sacrifices, which pointed to CHRIST, at the time when this great person was about to be manifested. The gift of prophecy, and that of miracles, had ceased amongst the Jews above four hundred years; and therefore, it must be supposed, that this miraculous event would rouse the attention of the nation, awaken every desire in their hearts for the coming of the Messiah, and make them more circumspect in observing the tokens of his appearance. And as the Jewish nation, at this time, was under great tribulation and contempt, and oppression of the Gentiles, it may be supposed, that the God of Israel graciously condescended to give them this eminent token of his favour, and gave this wonderful healing virtue to these blood-stained waters, that they might not despair of the fulfilment of his ancient promises, but have an eye to the blood of the covenant, and expect the appearance of that great person, of whom Isaiah prophesied, *He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.* And as God was pleased, at this time, to give such a wonderful virtue to a fountain of water, it may reasonably be supposed, that he designed to lead the minds of the devout worshippers in his temple to that great person, of whom it was prophesied that he should be *a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.*

Jesus being come to Jerusalem to the feast of the passover, repaired to the pool of Bethesda, and took a view of the various subjects of disease, infirmity, and affliction, which crowded the porches and waited for the troubling of the waters. Had these miserable objects applied to our great Redeemer for help, no doubt, they would all have experienced the great effects of that divine power of healing, which this illustrious person so eminently possessed: but it is to be supposed, that he was absolutely unknown amongst them

and no blessing or benefit was expected from him. This may be supposed to be the reason why our great Redeemer did not extend his heavenly goodness to the whole number of those afflicted and diseased persons; for the general account which the evangelists give of his divine compassion on other occasions is, that *he healed all who came to him.* Such diseased persons who left their habitations, out of a persuasion of his divine power and goodness, were the first objects of his compassion, and never returned without a cure; but the sick at the pool of Bethesda, were attentive to other means of relief, and thought not of the Redeemer of Israel.

Amongst these miserable objects, was a man who had labored under his disease no less than thirty-eight years. The long continuance, as well as the distressful nature of this man's affliction, was well known to the Son of God; and amongst the great number of diseased persons which he beheld crowding the porches that surrounded the pool, our exalted Saviour singled out this poor man as the object of his compassion; and accosted him with this question, *Wilt thou be made whole?* this question seemed designed to excite the attention of the people around, and to give the impotent man an opportunity of relating the malignant nature, and long continuance of his disease, and, of consequence, making manifest the divine power which could instantaneously remove it. The infirm person, thinking the question of our Lord had an immediate reference to the waters of the pool, replied, *Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.* But our great Redeemer soon convinced him, that he was not to receive his cure from the healing virtue of the waters, nor to wait till the angel came down to trouble them; but would receive immediate relief, by the mighty power of the Son of God, and accordingly bid him *arise, take up his bed, and walk.* The powerful words had no sooner fallen from

the lips of this divine person, than the great event took place. The impotent man felt a sudden warmth and vigour run through his relaxed nerves, and his feeble limbs assumed their youthful strength; when, finding himself able to perform the command of his great benefactor, he made no scruple of taking up his bed, and carrying it along the streets, though it was the Sabbath-day.

So great a miracle could not fail exciting the wonder of the spectators; and the new cured man, carrying his bed through the city on the Sabbath-day, which was a thing not practised by the Jews, and must have a strange appearance to the beholders, would not fail to spread the account of this surprising event through the whold city. The man, who had so wonderfully recovered the use of his limbs, did not scruple to obey the commands of the Divine Physician, though they were contrary to the custom of his country, and would be likely to expose him to the blame of the Jews; he well knew, that a person who could perform such wonderful works, must be a great prophet; and he supposed that such a person would not order him to perform any action which was sinful, and therefore, regardless of the reproaches he met with from the Jews, he carried his bed through the streets of the city. The Jews beheld him with a mixture of indignation and contempt, and angrily told him, that it was not lawful for him to carry his bed on the Sabbath-day. But the man, elated by his happy deliverance, and holding his great benefactor in the highest esteem, thought it sufficient to answer, *He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk*, John v. 11. The Jews, not satisfied with this answer, sharply inquired, who it was that had made him whole: which question the man was not able to answer, as JESUS, as soon as he had performed the miracle, had mixed with the crowd, and was imperceivably departed from them.

Some time after this, the person who had thus been miraculously restored, met with the Divine Physician in the temple, who took the opportunity to impress on his mind, a sense of the great benefit he had received, and the obligations he lay under to amendment of life. *Behold thou art made whole,* said our great Redeemer, *sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.* The evangelist has not informed us what effect this admonition had on the person who had been healed; but having, by this event, found out his great benefactor, he, no doubt, expecting the whole nation would revere so extraordinary a person, went to the ruler of the Jews, and told them, that *it was Jesus who had made him whole.*

This information had a very different effect than what might be expected; the pride and obstinacy of the rulers of Israel, prevented their conviction, and their inveterate prejudices blinded their eyes, so that every manifestation of divine power was lost on them: for instead of reverencing the Redeemer of Israel, and rejoicing that God had remembered his people, they tumultuously attacked him in the temple, and, probably carried him before the Sanhedrim with an intention to take away his life, because he had done good on the Sabbath-day. Our great Redeemer, in answer to their calumny, observed, that by doing good on the Sabbath-day, he acted consistent with the conduct of his heavenly Father, who, as Supreme Governor of the universe, carried on the order of nature, and supplied the wants of his numerous creatures, without distinction of days; and whose providence is constantly employed in doing good to the sons of men without intermission, or regard to times and seasons. But the Jews were not to be convinced by argument, they cherished in their minds a growing rancour, and an implacable hatred to the Son of God; so that what he had observed, instead of composing their minds, only tended to irritate and inflame them: and they attacked him with mortal hatred, and all the virulence of abuse, and stood deter-

mined to take away his life because *he not only had broken the Sabbath, but had said that God was his Father; making himself equal with God.*

Had the Jews been wrong in this conclusion, that CHRIST, in the account which he gave of himself, made himself equal with God, no doubt that divine person, in whom dwelt eternal truth, would have set them to rights in a matter of such high importance, which so nearly concerned himself, and which he was the only proper person to explain. But we find, that the following discourse of our great Redeemer, did not tend to discredit such a conclusion, but to establish and enforce it. He begins with observing, that so close is the connection, and such the equality between himself and the Father, that the same works which are ascribed to one, may be properly ascribed to the other. *Verily, verily, I say unto you,* said our great Redeemer, *the Son can do nothing himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise: for the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things, that himself doeth; and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.* From this testimony which the Son of God bears to his own divinity, it is evident, that all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father, and that the stupendous works of creation, providence, and grace, may be justly ascribed to our dear Immanuel: and him we may adore, as the great Maker, the All-wise and All-potent Preserver, the Great Supreme Governor, and Judge of the universe.

The Saviour of the world then proceeded to refer to those particular works which manifested him to be the Son of God, and, of consequence, by their own conclusion, equal with the Father; and in this view, he mentions the manifestation of his divine power in raising the dead: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear*

the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, so he hath given to the Son, to have life in himself: and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. The evidence of the divinity of the Saviour of the world, arises not only from the divine power which he manifested in raising the natural dead, but was also abundantly manifest by his divine power, exerted in raising dead sinners; which is a work which can be effected by nothing less than the mighty power of God; and to which these remarkable words seem to allude.

But our great Redeemer proceeds further to assert and enforce his own divinity, and equality with his Father, by observing, that to him is assigned the great work of sitting in judgment, and fixing the eternal state of all mankind. *Marvel not at this,* said he, *for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall come forth: they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. And my judgment is just because I seek not mine own will, but the will of my Father who sent me.* On that great and terrible day, the fate of a fallen world will be decided by Unerring Wisdom, and the invariable rules of righteousness and goodness: for the great Judge of heaven and earth hath a full and clear perception of every action which has been performed from the beginning to the end of time; and he is absolutely impartial and unbiased, having no inclination to satisfy, no end to pursue, different from those of his heavenly Father.

The great Saviour of the world, as a further confirmation of his divinity, appealed to the testimony of John, to whom the Pharisees had formerly sent a deputation to know his opinion of CHRIST. Our Lord observed, that *he was a burning and a shining light,* in which, for a time, the Jews greatly rejoiced, and they had cause to rejoice, because the prophetic spirit,

which had so long ceased in Israel, had been revived in that holy man; and he had given a full and clear testimony, that JESUS was the Son of God: but our Redeemer proceeded to a greater testimony than that of John, which was no other than God himself, who, by his miracles which he daily directed him to perform was bearing a constant witness to the truth of his divinity, and had by an audible voice at his baptism, declared him to be his well-beloved Son; a voice which multitudes of people had heard, and perhaps some of those to whom he was now speaking.

And for a further confirmation of the great truth he had been maintaining, our Lord, as a means to strike a full conviction in the minds of the Jews, with whom he was conversing, appealed to their own Scriptures: *Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.* But notwithstanding the clearness of the ancient prophecies, and the remarkable manner in which they described and pointed out the Saviour of sinners, that unhappy nation was so blinded by their prejudices and vices, that they could not believe. The Jews had long expected the Messiah to appear amongst them, but they had formed very different conceptions of his appearance, than the designs of heaven, or the descriptions of their prophets. The Scribes and Pharisees had long amused themselves, and filled the minds of the people with grand and magnificent ideas of the Messiah's kingdom; they had represented him as a potent prince, who was to be adorned with all the ensigns of power, and the glory of sovereign greatness; he was to sit on the throne of his father David, and raise it in power, greatness, glory, grandeur, and magnificence, above all the kingdoms of the earth. Hence it was, that they could not acknowledge JESUS as their Messiah; they took offence at the meanness of his appearance; and though the mighty works which he performed, fully manifested the truth of his mission, and were sufficient to convince every impartial and

unprejudiced mind, that he was really the Messiah; yet the pride of that infatuated nation, could not stoop so low as to acknowledge him: nor could their teachers, who had filled their minds with such vast expectations of temporal greatness, condescend to confess themselves so much mistaken in the meaning of the prophets.

But to conclude this discourse, our Lord proceeded to observe that he himself should not be their only accuser to his Father, but they would be condemned for their infidelity by their great legislator, Moses, on whom they trusted as their invariable friend. *Do not think*, said he, *that I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust: for had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me: but if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my word?*

With such observations and arguments as these, the blessed JESUS combated the pride and prejudice of the Jewish nation, and proved himself to be the Son of God, the great Judge of the whole earth, and the Messiah promised by the ancient prophets; and so plain and convincing were the proofs and arguments he brought, that his adversaries could not reply; but though they were silenced by the wisdom of his words, their old prejudices remained; and their being baffled and overcome in every contest, filled them with a growing rancour and settled hatred to his person, which shewed itself on every occasion, and proceeded so far as to induce them to endeavour to take away his life.

Nor was it long before the proud and envious Scribes and Pharisees found a fresh opportunity to exclaim against our great Redeemer, and pursue him with their impertinent objections and cavils; for going with his train through the corn-fields on the Sabbath-day, his disciples plucked the ears of [illegible] th grain,

after rubbing it in their hands, and the Pharisees with the utmost severity and bitterness exclaimed against this as a prophanation of the Sabbath. Our Lord, in reply to this calumny reminded them of the conduct of David, who, in a case of necessity, when he fled from Saul, permitted his servants, and presumed himself, to eat of the shew-bread which was kept in the tabernacle, and was not lawful for any to eat but the priests; and further to convince them of the folly of their remarks, our Lord referred them to the conduct of their own priests, who constantly performed the necessary work of the temple on the Sabbath-day: from whence it appears, that works of necessity had been always permitted on the Sabbath-day, though it was contrary to the command of the law. Our Lord further observed, that it was necessary the Scribes and Pharisees should know that *the Son of man was Lord of the Sabbath:* for as the work which himself and his disciples constantly attended to was promoting the eternal interest of mankind, they had a greater right to claim an exemption from the strict observance of the Sabbath than the priests in the temple, who were only concerned in the practice of ritual observances, could pretend to. And in the conclusion of this discourse, our great Redeemer took notice, that acts of mercy should always be performed, though they were attended with the violation of some of the sacred institutions of the ceremonial law; for it would be inverting the order of nature, and reversing the immutable rules of reason, and the nature of things to suppose that *man was made for the Sabbath, and not the Sabbath for the use and benefit of man.*

Soon after this debate with the Scribes and Pharisees, our blessed Saviour, entered one of the synagogues of Jerusalem on the Sabbath-day, and in the assembly there was a man whose right hand was withered.

The Pharisees rightly concluded that such an object

of distress would excite the compassion of that divine physician, who had so often exerted the wonderful power he possessed in behalf of the helpless and miserable: and, observing that JESUS took particular notice of the infirm person, they watched him with all the keenness and rancour of the most inveterate malice, concluding that they should now have an opportunity of accusing him to the people as a breaker of the Sabbath. So full of pride and self-sufficiency was this hypocritical generation, and so greatly they valued themselves on the exact performance of external ceremonies, that they could openly accuse our great Redeemer of a capital offence for healing the diseased on the Sabbath-day: but so blind and stupid were these doctors of the law, that they could not see that themselves were profaning and polluting that sacred day of rest, by indulging the most diabolical dispositions, and practising the most attrocious actions which could be committed. Such was their endeavouring to destroy a virtuous and innocent person, who had never injured them, whose conduct and character demanded the highest respect, and whose life was spent in promoting the best interest of mankind.

The Saviour of the world was not unacquainted with their deadly malice, nor their present intentions to take an advantage of his heavenly goodness; he knew the rancour of their hearts; he penetrated their deepest designs; and unmoved by their impotent rage, he ordered the person to stand up in the full view of the whole congregation, and publicly avowed his design to heal him.

The hypocritical teachers of Israel exclaimed against the beneficent action he was about to perform, as an impious and unlawful profanation of the Sabbath. *Is it*, said they, *lawful to heal on the sabbath-day?* It is not to be supposed that, by this exclamation, they designed to prevent the performance of the miracle, but rather to draw from our great Redeemer such an an-

swer as they might take advantage of, and which might give them an opportunity to accuse him with the greater success: but our Lord answered them in such a manner as let them know that he penetrated their deepest designs, and at the same time baffled and confounded their utmost rage. *Is it*, said he, *lawful to do good on the Sabbath-day, or to do evil? To save life, or to destroy it?* Is it lawful for you, ye most detestable hypocrites, to harbour in your minds the most infernal rancour and hatred against me; and with the highest injustice and cruelty to plot against my life on the Sabbath-day? And is it not lawful for me to restore to his former strength, this poor distressed man who stands before you? The justice and severity of this rebuke struck them dumb; and, not being able to reply, they pretended not to understand his meaning: but to leave them without excuse, our Lord made use of an argument which stupidity itself could not mistake, and which all the sophistry of these hypocritical teachers was not able to evade. *What man*, said our exalted Saviour, *shall there be amongst you, who shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath-day.*

This plain reference to their own practice was so clear and convincing, that they could not pretend to be ignorant of it; and so full that they were effectually silenced though they were determined not to be convinced. This wicked perverseness and unconquerable obstinacy, grieved the spirit of the meek and lowly, the kind and benevolent Son of God, who looking round on his enemies with a mixture of compassion and sorrow, kindly commanded the lame man to stretch out his hand: the man gladly obeyed, and instantly it was restored whole as the other.

This astonishing work, our great Redeemer performed in a large congregation in the full view of all

the people, in whom the foregoing dispute had raised a curiosity to behold the event; and as, no doubt, it was performed on a person that frequented the synagogue, most of the persons there present were acquainted with the man, while he laboured under this infirmity, and seeing JESUS in such a situation in the midst of his most inveterate enemies, it must certainly have a great effect on the minds of the beholders, especially as they saw that it had effectually silenced the Pharisees, who had nothing to offer, either against the miracle itself, the proofs and reasonings urged for the fitness and propriety of it, or the divine power of him who had performed it.

But though these proud, envious, and hypocritical teachers were astonished at the miracles, and silenced by the arguments of the Son of God, yet they were far from giving up their unjust and cruel institutions: for though they bore an inveterate hatred to the Sadducees and Herodians because they presumed to differ from them in their religious sentiments, yet they could join with these persons they so much despised and consult with them in order to take away his life.

For they well knew that if he continued the course of his ministry, and produced such incontestible evidences of divine power, the people would follow him; when their own weight and influence would quickly decline, and their preaching become contemptible.—JESUS well knew their wicked designs, yet he did not think proper at this time, any further to oppose them, but retired into Galilee, to the borders of the lake of Chinnereth.

This retreat of our great Redeemer seems to have displeased some of his disciples, who had strongly imbibed the popular idea of the Messiah's temporal kingdom, and expected that he would have established his authority by force, and exerted his divine power to bear down all opposition; and they were extremely

mortified to find their Master give way and seem to decline any further contest. But the obscurity of his retreat could not conceal him from the multitudes who flocked to him from all quarters, bringing with them their sick and diseased; and his heavenly goodness healed them all. Nor would the disciples have been offended at this mild and peaceable conduct of their Master, had they attentively considered the prophecy of Isaiah, where this peaceable disposition is particularly insisted on as eminently distinguishing the character of the Messiah. *Behold my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoaking flax he shall not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.* Matthew xii. 12, &c.

The small variations between this prophecy, as quoted by St. Matthew, and the original in the book of Isaiah, are of no consequence, as the sense is the same; and here it may be worthy of remark, that this prophecy describes the publication of the Christian religion by JESUS CHRIST, vastly different from that of the Jewish religion by Moses. The law of Moses was published with thunder and fire, and the strongest circumstances of terror from mount Sinai, and only extended to the single nation of the Israelites: the doctrine of salvation, as published by the Messiah, was mild, peaceable, and gentle, and was extended to every nation and people under heaven. Accordingly, our Lord, by retiring to Galilee, fulfilled the first part of this famous prophecy, *He shall shew judgment to the Gentiles;* for we are informed by the evangelist that great multitudes came to him from beyond Jordan, and from Syria, and from the countries about Tyre and Sidon.

While our Lord remained in Galilee, there was brought unto him a blind and dumb man, possessed with a devil; but he, with a single word, cast out the evil spirit, and immediately restored to the poor man the noble faculties of sight and speech. An event so surprising, so miraculous, and so suddenly wrought, could not fail of exciting the astonishment of the beholder; and the honest plain-hearted part of the nation were inclined to believe. But the Pharisees, who had followed him from Jerusalem with the basest intentions, were filled with the most tormenting envy at seeing him perform such surprising miracles and burning with all the rage of disappointed malice, contrary to all the rules of reason and the conviction of their own minds, impudently and wickedly ascribed his miracles to the power of the devil: an affirmation so horrid, abominable and desperately wicked, could not escape the notice, or fail of exciting the sharp rebukes of the Son of God; who addressing himself both to his enemies and the surrounding multitude, demonstrated the absurdity and impossibility of such a conclusion from the common affairs of life. *Every kingdom* said the blessed JESUS, *divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself: how then shall his kingdom stand?* How foolish and ridiculous is it to suppose that the Devil would act against himself, and undermine the foundations of his own kingdom! To which our great Redeemer thought fit to add, *If I by Belzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then is the kingdom of God come unto you.* You did not impute the miracles of your prophets to Belzebub but received them on the evidence of these miracles as the messengers of God: but ye reject me, who work greater or more numerous miracles that they, and impute them to the power of the Devil. Is this conduct consistent; or is it possible to reconcile it to reason or common sense? These prophets therefore shall be your

judges; and they shall condemn you. But if it is true, that I cast out devils by the Almighty Power and Spirit of God, it follows, that the kingdom of God so long expected, and ardently desired, is going to be established amongst you. Is not the horrid impudence of this blasphemy of yours really astonishing! But great as your crime is, it may yet be forgiven; because fuller and more manifest evidences of the truth of my mission, may hereafter convince you of your wickedness, and excite you to believe; and the time is coming, when the Son of man shall be raised from the dead and the gift of miracles by the power of the Holy Ghost will be bestowed on almost every believer. The nature of the Messiah's kingdom will be more fully explained, and such proofs given, as if attended to, will be abundantly sufficient to remove your prejudices and overcome your obstinacy and prevailing unbelief. But if you then shut your eyes, and speak evil against the Holy Ghost, contrary to the conviction of your minds, maliciously ascribing the miracles wrought by his power and his extraordinary gifts, to proceed from the prince of darkness, you have willfully shut your eyes against the light; you have dared to insult the eternal God to his face; you have resisted, wilfully resisted, the last means which he will use to convince you: and you never will be forgiven, but shall surely fall under the fierceness of his wrath, both in this world and that which is to come. *Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.*

The awful and alarming denunciation against the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, was probably laid down by our Saviour at this time, to apprise the Pharisees of their danger, to awaken them to a sense of their

obstinate and envious opposition to the truth, and make them afraid of the consequence, if they persisted in such detestable calumnies, when their own hearts told them that they had no foundation in reason, but what flowed from malice and resentments: but the most powerful arguments, or the most awful threatenings, had no effect on this obstinate and perverse race of mortals, who sarcastically answered, *Master, we would see a sign from thee.* What astonishing stupidity! Had he not, the moment before, cast out a devil, and restored the faculties of sight and speech to the blind and dumb! Had not he cleansed lepers, raised the dead, and rebuked the tempestuous winds and raging waves of the sea! Were not these signs sufficient to have convinced the most obstinate and bigotted mortal! What therefore could these stubborn doctors of the law require! Well might the great Saviour of the world call them *a wicked and adulterous generation;* for certainly they could justly pretend to no part of the faith and piety of their great father Abraham; he believed God, and, it was imputed to him for righteousness: but they, by their malicious obstinacy, and determined unbelief, added sin to sin, and plunged themselves into the depth of iniquity and wickedness. Persons of such perverse dispositions, and incorrigible tempers, merited no indulgence; and, therefore, our great Redeemer told them, that no sign should be given them, but that of the prophet Jonah, who, by lying three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, was a type of the Son of God, who should continue three days and three nights in the chambers of the grave.

Our Lord then proceeded to observe, that the obstinacy, perverseness, and wickedness of that generation, was greater than that of the most barbarous, ignorant, and idolatrous nations, who would rise in judgment with them and condemn them.

The people of Nineveh repented at the preaching

of Jonah; and the queen of the South took a long journey to behold the wisdom of Solomon; but the obstinate, wicked, and unbelieving Jews, would not repent at the preaching, and repeated warnings of the Son of God, nor learn wisdom from the Eternal Fountain of Wisdom itself.

Our Lord then concluded his discourse with a parable, which shewed the great danger of wilfully opposing and resisting the truth, as such practices tend to make men habitually and desperately wicked, and, in every respect, more obdurate and abandoned than before.

During this dispute with the rulers of Israel, JESUS was informed, that his mother and his kinsmen waited without, desiring an interview with him; upon which, with a look of the tenderest affection, he stretched out his hand toward his disciples, and said, *Behold my mother and my brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother,* Matt. xii. 49, 50. These remarkable words ought to be received with the warmest gratitude, and the most exalted joy, by every christian: since from this divine declaration, it may be learnt, that a faith in CHRIST, which works by love, and produces a conformity to the precepts of the gospel, gives the believer a claim to the high title of a Son of the Most High, and a near relation to his dear Redeemer: by this divine principle, the believer lays hold on the blessings and privileges which belong to his spiritual birth, he claims a kindred to the skies, he becomes acquainted with his union with the Divine Nature, and can stand before the throne of the Eternal God, and call him his Father.

CHAPTER XVI.

Jesus delivers several Parables from a Ship, to the Multitudes that were standing on Shore: He receives a second Visit from his Relations; At evening he retires to Capernaum, and delivers more Parables to his Disciples: Afterwards, he returns to Nazareth, his own City, and sends his Apostles to preach about that Country: He then repairs to the Desert of Bethsaida and provides a miraculous Repast for the whole Multitude.

THE public debate in which Jesus was engaged with the Pharisees, and the miracle which was the occasion of it, brought together such a vast concourse of people, that, for the greater facility of instructing them, our great Redeemer repaired to the sea-side. The crowd pressed so close about him, that he was incommoded in his office of speaking, and for the greater conveniency, he entered a ship and put off to some small distance from the shore, while the attentive multitudes remained on dry land: being thus conveniently accommodated for public speaking, our divine instructor proceeded to lay down several precepts of the utmost importance, which he thought proper to introduce in the parabolical stile. This was a mode of instruction, very common in the Oriental nations, and it was the general method of the old prophets, John the Baptist, and our blessed Saviour, to inculcate divine and moral truths, in the beautiful method of allusion and fable; and sometimes so to contrive the discourse, that it had an immediate reference to those objects, which at that very time presented themselves to the view of the audience. This method of instructing was, on several accounts, particularly adapted to the designs of divine conduct, and the circumstances of the Jewish nation, at the time of the Messiah's appearance. Similitudes of this kind, are the most easy and simple methods of teaching; they are best accommo-

dated to the apprehensions of the ignorant and unlearned, and are very easy to be understood, remembered, and applied at the same time; they are the finest veil for mysteries, and the best medium for concealing from the proud and obstinate, those truths which their perverseness and infidelity render them unworthy of having more clearly revealed.

These observations seem to be alluded to by our great Redeemer himself, when his disciples asked, why he taught the people in parables? *Because*, said he, *it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them it is not given: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away, even that he hath. Therefore, speak I unto them in parables; because, in seeing they see not: and in hearing they hear not, neither do they understand*, Matt. xiii. 11, &c. The beloved disciples, whom our Redeemer, by his divine power, had made of an humble, teachable disposition, whose minds, by an heavenly influence, were become docile, apt to learn, and open to instruction, were thus addressed by the divine Instructor, and he gives them to understand, that it would be no disadvantage to them, nor to any that sincerely desired to be instructed, and attended on him in humility of heart, that the truths he delivered were clothed in parables; for such persons would carefully consider his words, and resort to him for their explanation: and the truths themselves, clothed in this beautiful veil, would be more attractive to the humble inquiring mind: and, when carefully considered, appear, plain, simple, and easy to be understood.

But the proud, self-conceited Scribes and Pharisees, were so blinded by their prejudices, that they would not give themselves time to consider, but would heartily despise such methods of teaching, and condemn, as low and contemptible, the plain allusions in which

the divine truths were represented. Our great Redeemer did not alter his manner of teaching, for their sakes, but dressed the great truths of the gospel in such metaphorical robes as they did heartily despise, and which would forever conceal them from persons of their temper and conduct. Nor need it be wondered at, the blessed JESUS further observed, that he took this method with this sort of men; for it had been prophesied of him, that he should *open his mouth in parables, and utter things which had been kept secret from the foundation of the world.* And concerning the pride, obstinacy, perverseness, and infidelity of the rulers of the Jews, Isaiah had long ago prophesied to them, that, *by hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this peoples heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed: lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

There is some little variation between the words, as quoted by our Saviour, and those found in the prophecy of Isaiah, but the meaning is the same in each, and the sense manifestly is, that the Jewish nation should hear the doctrines of the gospel, but not understand them: and see the miracles wrought in confirmation of the truth of those doctrines but not perceive them to be wrought by the power of God: not because the evidences produced by our great Redeemer were insufficient to convince a judicious and impartial inquirer after truth; but because the corruption and depravity of the hearts of the proud Pharisees would not suffer them to examine and weigh these evidences; for the sins of that people had hardened their hearts, their pride and vanity had shut their ears, and their hypocrisy and bigotted adherence to tradition, and forced interpretations of the law, had closed their eyes; so that the bright rays of divine truth could not shine upon their dark minds, nor the

powerful voice of heavenly wisdom, awaken their attention, or command their assent.

Such were the reasons assigned by our great Redeemer, for his teaching the people in parables; and then he proceeded to remind his disciples of the great privileges they enjoyed, in having the opportunity of learning, from his heavenly lips, those things which the prophets of old so earnestly desired to know and understand: *But blessed*, said he, *are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear: for verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them.*

The first parable which the blessed JESUS delivered to the multitude, was that of the sower, who cast his seed into different kinds of soil, the product of which was answerable to the nature of the ground: some yielding a large increase and some none at all; by which he elegantly displayed the success of his own doctrine, amongst the several kinds of hearers to which it would be preached. *A sower*, said he, *went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choaked them; but others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold.*

This parable was peculiarly proper to be considered by the multitudes who attended on the Son of God, when such vast numbers heard his discourses, and so few practised his precepts, or profitted by the heavenly doctrines which he taught. Not only the multitude,

but the disciples heard him with a mixture of pleasure and surprise; and, not understanding his meaning, they were impatient to hear it explained; and were very urgent to know, why he chose that method of instruction.

The last of these questions, our Lord answered in the manner before related; and then with condescending kindness, proceeded to give them the explanation of the parable of the sower: *When any one*, said he, *heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received the seed by the way side.* The persons who are here represented as hearing the word of God without understanting, are those careless hearers, whose minds are diverted from attending to those things which concern their everlasting peace, by the gay, trifling amusements and alluring objects of sense. Such persons hear the word of God with so little attention, that they scarcely know what they hear; and for want of an habit of serious thinking, their ideas are loose and scattered, and an universal dissipation of mind drives out all solid reflection. Such persons as these, are at all times proper objects for the great enemy of mankind to work upon; he well knows how to take advantage of the vacancy of thought, which exposes such minds to his malicious attempts; and, where he finds the mind empty, he takes care to enter there, and fill it with such furniture, as soon erases the slight impressions it may have received by hearing the word of God.

The second kind of hearers, described in the parable of the sower, are those who receive the word with a greater degree of attention, and in whom it produces an outward reformation of conduct and behaviour; but, not being impressed on the mind by the operation of the Divine Spirit, it does not effect a real change of heart. Such persons, while things go on smooth,

and they meet with success and encouragement in the world, may make a profession, and appear to others, and think themselves religious, but like seed sown on hard, stony ground, which, though it springs up, and looks green for a while, yet, when the sun shines hot and bright, soon withers for want of root; they cannot stand in the day of adversity and trouble: *for when tribulation, or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by they are offended.*

The third kind of hearers, are those who seem to receive the word of God with great earnestness and attention; but however they may be delighted with it in the house of God, they do not carry a savor of it into the world. In some, the toil, trouble, care, and vexation arising from their circumstances in the world, so fill the mind, engage the attention, overwhelm the spirit, and oppress the heart, that, like a plant incumbered and surrounded with rank, poisonous weeds, the word of God, which they have heard, cannot grow; the noble truths of the gospel cannot have their proper influence on the mind, but gradually sink and decline till at last they are disbelieved, or totally forgotten. Others, who meet with their desired success in their worldly cares, are so assidious in the pursuit and so entirely devoted to the acquisition of wealth, that every thing to them seems little and low which does not produce some temporal advantage: as riches increase, they set their hearts upon them, and a worldly spirit *choaks the word, and it becometh unfruitful.*

In opposition to those unprofitable hearers of the word, a fourth sort are represented in this parable, whose hearts, by the Holy Spirit, are prepared for the reception of divine truth; for, as the best of ground, except it be ploughed, harrowed and cleansed by the husbandman, will not receive the seed, nor produce a plentiful harvest; so the heart of man, except it be changed by divine power, will not receive the word of God, nor produce such fruit as the gospel requires:

but, when the heavenly seed falls on those hearts which have been wrought upon and prepared by the Divine Spirit, the word is received with gladness, it takes deep root in the mind, it operates on all the powers and faculties of the soul, it terminates in obedience to the precepts of the gospel, and brings forth fruit to the honour and interest of the cause of CHRIST, in proportion to the capacities and circumstances of the different subjects on which it falls, *in some an hundred fold, in some sixty, and some thirty.*

Our great Redeemer, having finished his explanation of the parable of the sower, turned to his disciples, and explained to them, by the similitude of a lighted candle, the use they were to make of the knowledge which they would acquire by conversing with him, and receive his divine instructions. *Is a candle,* said he, *brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested, neither was any thing kept secret, but it should come abroad.* By which the divine Instructor gave them to understand, that, though now these heavenly truths were veiled in shades and figures, and taught to mankind in parables, the time would come, that they would be more clearly revealed, and, as a lighted candle, exalted on high, illuminates the whole apartment where it is placed, so shall the brightness of divine truth, by their preaching, be spread abroad, and enlighten the dark nations of the earth: therefore, as the disciples of CHRIST were intended to convey the precepts of heavenly instruction to the dark, unenlightened nations of the world, our Lord reminded them, that it was a matter of the highest importance, that they should be rightly and fully taught those truths they were to bear to the remotest nations; and, therefore, it behoved them to hear him with the utmost care and attention. *Take heed,* said he, *what ye hear; with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear shall more be given.*

After our Lord had been thus discoursing to his disciples, he turned to the multitude on the shore, and, addressing them in the most pleasing and powerful manner, he delivered to them the parable of the enemy's sowing tares amongst the wheat. *The kingdom of heaven*, said he, *is likened to a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares amongst the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the husbandman came and said unto him, Sir didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, an enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both go together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest, I will say unto the reapers, Gather ye the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*

This parable, as our Lord afterwards explained it to his disciples, relates to the different states of men at the end of the world. The husbandman is our great Redeemer himself; the field is the christian church, planted in various parts of the world; those Christians who are enabled by the Holy Spirit to love the Lord JESUS CHRIST, and bring fruit worthy their high profession, are the wheat; and those who make an empty profession without knowing the power of true religion, are the tares. These are seduced into the paths of wickedness by the enemy of God and man; and the parable elegantly represents the mixed state of the professing church on earth, and the deplorable end of the hypocrite and those who know not God. Such characters as these may mix with the real Christians, and may deceive for a time, by assuming the appearance of superior sanctity and strictness of life; yet they will not fail sooner or later, to betray themselves, and make it manifest that they are but

tares amongst the wheat. Yet we are taught by this parable, how sincerely soever we may wish to free the church from all corruption both in doctrine and practice; it is not lawful for us to assume the prerogative of the great Judge of heaven and earth, by persecuting, or following with any corporeal punishment, any whom we apprehend to be hypocrites and corrupters of true religion. The tares and the wheat are to grow together till harvest, they are not to be separated, lest by mistaking the character of their persons, we bestow the censure on the true Christian, which belongs to the hypocrite: but the harvest will come when they will be separated by our great Redeemer himself, and his attending angels: then the tares will be bound up in bundles and burnt, but the wheat carefully gathered into the barn. For at the end of the world, our great Redeemer will distinguish between the pretended and the real Christian; the wicked will be condemned to eternal torment, but the righteous will be received to life eternal; when they *shall shine forth, as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father.*

The next parable which our exalted Redeemer thought fit to propose to the listening multitudes, was that of the seed which sprang up and grew imperceptibly. *So is the kingdom of God,* said he, *as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of itself; first the blade and then the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.* This beautiful picture represents the gradual and silent progress of the gospel in the heart of man; as the husbandman does not by any power of his own, cause the seed to grow when he has sown it, but the blade and fruit are produced by the power of the great Creator, and by those laws of nature which he hath established in the vegetable creation: so the seed of divine truth does not thrive in the heart of man by the power of the

preacher, but by the silent and efficacious energy of the Spirit of God. Thus JESUS and his apostles, having preached the gospel in the world, and taught the doctrines of true religion, gave no commission to any to use the terrors of fire and sword to propagate them, but left it to the silent and secret influence of the Holy Spirit. And it is very probable that the blessed JESUS spoke this parable to convince the Jews of their mistake, in supposing that their Messiah would set up a temporal kingdom, and advance his dominion by the means which are used in the world to rise to sovereign greatness: and also it might be intended to quiet the minds of his disciples, and prevent them from being discouraged when they saw that an immediate and rapid success did not attend their labours in the gospel.

The next parable which JESUS spake to the multitude was that of the grain of mustard seed, which in Palestine and other parts of the East, rises from a small seed to a large spreading tree. *The kingdom of heaven*, said the divine Instructor *is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.* This may be considered as a continuation of the subject of the former parable; for though the gospel seed may at first seem small and contemptible, arising from the crucifixion of its divine author, the inveterate hatred and final unbelief of the Jews, the mortifying nature of its precepts, the weakness of the persons employed to propagate its divine truths, and the small number and meanness of those who first received it, yet being founded on eternal truth, and supported by divine power, it would increase to a surprising extent and greatness, filling the whole world, and affording divine instruction and comfort to persons of all nations, who should enjoy the high privileges of the Messiah's kingdom, while

the Jews, for their wickedness in opposing the truth, should be left in unbelief, cut off from being a nation, and scattered like chaff over the face of the earth.

Our great Redeemer then concluded his discourse with another parable of nearly the same import with the foregoing. *The kingdom of heaven*, said he, *is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole is leavened:* alluding to the silent and effectual spreading of the gospel, by the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, and prevailing efficacy of divine truth.

While our Lord was employed in delivering these elegant and beautiful discourses, his mother and brethren came a second time, desiring an interview with him: perhaps they were unwilling that he should weary himself with the continual fatigue of preaching, and did not approve of making himself so public, and appearing in so distinguished a character amongst such vast multitudes of people: and as it hereafter will appear in the course of this history, that his brethren did not believe in him, it is very likely they designed to take him home with them, and persuade him to attend to secular affairs. But our exalted Redeemer was not to be diverted from following his Father's work, and performing the great duties of his mission. On these grounds he appears to have declined the desired interview, with this answer, *My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God, and do it.*

Evening now approaching, the Blessed Jesus dismissed the multitude, and retired with his disciples, to an house in Capernaum; where, at their desire, he explained to them the parable of the tares of the field in the manner before related; and then he proceeded to deliver to them the parable of the treasure hid in the field, and the parable of the pearl of great price.

The first of these parables holds forth the abundant glory, excellency and value of the gospel, above all earthly possessions; and the last denotes the willingness of all those who are made acquainted with the high excellency and abundant worth of the gospel, to part with their all in this world to obtain it. But, that the disciples might be informed that a mixed multitude of people who would make a profession of the gospel, and the hypocrites would be blended with the Christians in such a manner as would be difficult to separate them, he compared the gospel church to a net, which enclosed every sort of fish, good and bad, but were carefully separated when they were drawn to land; the good were preserved and the bad thrown away: alluding to the great day of universal and eternal decision and separation, when the righteous will be received into life eternal, and the wicked cast into hell.

Our Lord having finished these discourses, he asked his disciples if they understood them, they answered in the affirmative; and our great Redeemer added that every teacher of the gospel ought to resemble a person whose house was completely furnished, and bringeth *forth out of his treasures, things new and old.*

Not long after this, our great Redeemer left Capernaum, and repaired to Nazareth, the city where he had spent his younger years, and where he had dwelt with his relations till he entered on his public ministry, and preached amongst his old friends and countrymen, the glad-tidings of the kingdom. But they, though astonished at his doctrine, could not overcome the prejudices they had formerly conceived against him on account of the meanness of his family, and therefore would not own him to be the Messiah; they could not overcome the strong national prejudice they had conceived against their promised deliverer's appearing in a low, mean condition in the world; nor could they

give up their ideas of the glory and grandeur of the Messiah's appearance, so far as to suppose it possible that JESUS should be the man. Our Lord, therefore, finding them in the same temper of mind as when he formerly visited them, did not choose to stay long amongst them, but departed and taught in the neighbouring villages.

During our Saviour's stay at Nazareth, he sent out his disciples to preach in different parts of Galilee, and proclaim the glad-tidings that God was going to establish the glorious kingdom of the Messiah, in which he would be worshipped in spirit and truth; and that they might confirm the doctrines they taught, and convince the whole nation that they received their commission from the Son of God, they were endowed with the power of working miracles. The evangelists have not informed us how long they continued their preaching; but it is reasonable to suppose that they spent a considerable time in carrying on their work in several parts of the country.

The people perceiving such wonderful works performed by the disciples of CHRIST, were exceedingly amazed, and their expectations were raised very high; for they could not recollect that the old prophets had ever given to their servants the power of working miracles, and of consequence, they concluded that JESUS must be greater than any of them. This extraordinary circumstance raised the attention of the nation, and spread his fame so effectually about the country, that it reached the ears of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee. This prince having lately, in an unjust and cruel manner, taken away the life of John the Baptist, heard of the mighty works performed by CHRIST, and his disciples, with the utmost uneasiness and concern. His attendants endeavored to dissipate his fears, by telling him that one of the old prophets was risen from the dead; but a consciousness of his guilt would not permit him to rest; for he apprehended, that the illus-

trious person he had so basely murdered, was risen from the dead, and would doubtless be revenged on his murderer. He said unto his servants, *This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.*

It has been before related, on what occasion, and in what manner the Baptist was put to death; and the news of this mournful event having reached the disciples of CHRIST, while they were preaching in Galilee, those of them who had formerly been the disciples of John, went and paid their last respects to the remains of their master, whom having decently interred, they carried the tidings to JESUS. When our great Redeemer had heard of the death of his relation and forerunner, he found himself disposed for retirement, and sought the silent shades of the desert of Bethsaida: he departed as private as possible, that he might not be incommoded by the multitude, and for the greater secrecy he went by sea. But every precaution was insufficient to screen him from the penetrating eyes of the multitude who followed him; and his departure was not long concealed, for great numbers repaired to the desert, and found out the place of his retreat. The miracles which he performed, the benefit which the helpless and miserable, always found from his goodness and the strain of divine eloquence which flowed from his lips, had such an effect on the honest, open-hearted part of the nation, that the multitudes had seen the wonders he performed, and heard his heavenly voice, thought no difficulties too great to surmount, no hardships too great to endure, and no place too retired for them to penetrate, in order to attend on his ministry.

The kind and compassionate Saviour of sinners, seeing the multitude had found out his place of retreat and beholding them crowding about him, viewed them with tenderness and love, because they were as sheep having no shepherd; for, having none to instruct

them in those things which concerned their everlasting peace, they wandered about without a guide, without a defender. Their situation indeed, was like that of a large flock of sheep wandering upon the mountains, without a shepherd to feed and defend them from the ravenous jaws of the various beasts of prey which waited to devour them. The blessed JESUS, therefore, *that good Shepherd who came to lay down his life for the sheep*, beheld them with compassion: that same pity which brought him down from the throne of glory in heaven, for the sake of his lost and wandering sheep, now brought him to this multitude of people: his heavenly goodness healed all the sick amongst them, and from his lips they heard the words of eternal life.

The divine Instructor continued his heavenly discourses, and attended to the great work of healing the diseased, not dismissing the people, though the day wore away, and the shades of the evening were approaching. His disciples, thinking this circumstance had escaped his notice, thought proper to remind him, that the day was far advanced, and the place a solitary desert, where neither food nor lodging could be procured: it would, therefore, be convenient to dismiss the people, that they might repair to the towns or villages on the borders of the wilderness, and provide themselves food and other accommodations; for they had nothing to eat. But our Lord informed them, that he did not intend to dismiss the surrounding multitude so hastily, for, as they were weary and faint in the wilderness, it was his intention to give them a repast; at the same time, to try what opinion his disciples entertained of his power, he turned to Philip, who was well acquainted with the country, and inquired, *Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?* Philip, astonished at the proposal, considering the vastness of the multitude, and the enormous quantity of provisions which would be necessary to supply them, apprehended it impossible to

procure them in the desert; and not considering his Master's power to supply them by extraordinary means, replied, *Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.* Our blessed Lord might justly on this, as on a future occasion, have replied, *Have I been so long time with you, and hast thou not known me, Philip!* But he did not reproach his disciples with their inattention to his former character and conduct, but commanded them to give the multitude to eat. The disciples, not yet understanding the design of their Master, repeated the objection of Philip, and proposed to go and buy a quantity of provisions: but this was not their Lord's intention, who, without making them a direct answer, asked them how many loaves they had. It does not appear that they had any bread in possession; for after the disciples had made a diligent inquiry, Andrew came and informed his Master, that there was a lad amongst the multitude, that had five barley loaves, and two small fishes, a quantity so inconsiderable, that they were ashamed to mention it: *What are they,* said the disciples, *amongst so many?* And what, indeed, would they have been among such multitudes of people, if they had not been distributed by the all-creating hand of the Son of God.

Jesus, notwithstanding the smallness of the number of loaves, and scantiness of the provision, ordered them to be brought to him; and at the same time commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and ordered his disciples to arrange them in companies at convenient distances, that their number might be ascertained, and that they might be regularly served. In obedience to his command, the people sat down as they were ordered, no doubt wondering what would be the consequence of such an arrangement, and what benevolent action our great Redeemer was about to perform.

The multitude thus seated in order, our Lord in

open view, took the five loaves and two small fishes in his hands, and the whole multitude had an opportunity of beholding what a small quantity of provisions, in the hands of the Creator of all things, were sufficient to provide a repast for such a number of persons as were then assembled. The great master of the feast then looked up to heaven, and returned thanks to his heavenly Father, for his all-preserving and all-supporting goodness, manifested at all times to his creatures, but particularly for his paternal care, in providing for their present refreshment; he praised his Almighty Father, for the miracles which he had been enabled to perform for the benefit of mankind, and particularly for that which he was now going to perform, for the refreshment of the multitude, who had left their habitations with desires to see his mighty works, and hear his words, and followed him into the desert, where they were weary and faint for want of provisions. After which, our great Redeemer blessed the bread, and his divine blessing had so wonderful an effect, that the five small barley loaves and two dry fishes, were multiplied to a quantity sufficient to satisfy the craving appetites of ten thousand persons; for the men were five thousand, and it is very probable the women and children might not be less. The great Master of the feast distributed to his disciples, and they served the multitude as they sat on the grass; and so plentiful were the provisions, that every one was satisfied, and such fullness crowned our great Redeemer's board, that, when all the people had eat and were satisfied, there were twelve baskets filled with the broken meat.

Thus, the great Son of God, provided a feast in the desert, for the people who followed him; and though they had no canopy but the azure sky, no table but the verdant grass, no better fare than barley-bread and dried fish, and no drink but the clear spring; yet they were more honored by the presence of the illustrious founder of the feast, than ever was a royal banquet,

which was given by the Assyrian or Persian kings: and doubtless there was more heart-felt joy, and solid satisfaction at this feast, than ever was at the noble banquet of the gorgeous Ahasuerus, or the splendid entertainments of the imperious Belshazzar.

Have we not reason to wonder at the obstinacy and perverseness of the heads of the Jewish nation, that such a manifest display of divine power would not convince them. The account of this miracle, as recorded by the several evangelists, is very plain and circumstantial; and, it may be observed, that the particular circumstances of time and place, tended to make it more wonderful, more conspicuous, and less liable to objections and cavils. The place was a desert, where no bread could be procured, and therefore it is manifest, beyond contradiction, that it must be produced by a miracle. Had this repast been given to the surrounding multitude, at one of the towns or villages, it might have been objected, that bread had been secretly supplied; but neither the pharisees of those days, nor the infidels of ours, can tell us, how it was possible for any deception of that kind to be practised in the desert. And it may be further observed, that this mighty work was performed in the evening, when the people had been fasting all day, and, with the fatigue of travelling were, doubtless weary and very hungry. Had this repast been given in the morning, the miracle might have been depreciated, by supposing, that the people did not stand in need of refreshment, and this treat might have been represented as unnecessary: but the particular circumstances attending this wonderful work, cut off every shadow of an objection, and abundantly proved, that *God can furnish a table in the wilderness.*

The consideration of the wonderful power of the Son of God, thus manifested in procuring bread in the wilderness for so many thousands of people, ought to relieve the cares, and quiet the minds of his people concerning their daily bread. With what joy and sa-

tisfaction of soul, ought we to consider, that we are under the immediate care of our heavenly Father, whose paternal goodness provides subsistence for all his creatures; and, *who openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.* It is the beloved Son of the eternal Father, that showers down such a wide profusion of blessings on a thankless world; and according to the beautiful language of the Psalmist, "visiteth the earth, and blesseth it; who maketh it very plenteous, who watereth her furrows, and sendeth rain into the little vallies thereof; who maketh it soft with showers, and blesseth the increase thereof; who crowneth the year with his goodness, while his clouds drop fatness, making the vallies stand so thick with corn, that they laugh and sing." With what thankfulness and praise ought we to behold the constant effects of that heavenly goodness, which supplies the whole creation with food: ought we not to rely on the paternal care of the great Parent of nature, who manifests his goodness, and displays his bounty to an undeserving world, by *giving them rain and fruitful seasons, and filling their hearts with food and gladness?*

Nor should we be unmindful of the manifest exertion of divine power, in the constant supplies which are provided for a world of creatures, and in the abundant provision which is made for the daily supply of all mankind. Is it any less a miracle, that the supreme Lord of universal nature, should, every day, support and feed the whole race of mankind, and all the brute creation, than that he should feed ten thousand persons in the wilderness, with five loaves and two small fishes? What proportion does ten thousand persons bear to all the myriads of men on the face of the earth, who are daily fed by its fruits? And is not the increase of those fruits as great a miracle, and as manifest an exertion of divine power, as the increase of the bread by the blessing of our great Redeemer.

If we had hearts to consider the works of God with

attention and care, we should perceive the manifest exertions of his power, in the secret operations of Nature, and as clear proofs of his divinity in her regular productions, as in the most extraordinary and miraculous events. The marks of divine power are equally seen in the wine, which arises from the moisture of the earth, through the tubes of vegetation, and is received from the branches of the vine; as in that instantaneously made from water at the marriage at Cana. Nor ought they less to be regarded in the corn, gradually ripened, and made into bread for the support of all mankind; than in the bread miraculously blessed to the support of the multitude in the wilderness: but we are very prone to overlook the common operations of creative wisdom and power, without considering, that, if we are unaffected with the divine munificence and bounty, so manifestly and richly displayed in the works of nature and providence, there is much reason to conclude, that outward miracles would not awaken us to a sense of our duty, nor effectually mend our hearts: we are, however, very apt to deceive ourselves in this particular, and often led to conclude, that had we been present at so stupendous a miracle, as that we are now considering, we should have adored the divine hand that wrought it, and never have forsaken the Lord of life. But, alas, if all the display of divine wisdom and goodness in the works of creation; if all the evidences of the omnipotence of the Son of God, in the constant supplies which he provides for his numerous creatures; if the constant manifestations of his goodness to ourselves, in providing for us, and feeding us the whole course of our lives; will not elevate our hearts, and raise them to himself in gratitude and joy, there is the highest reason to conclude, that, had we seen the blessed JESUS feed ten thousand men, women, and children, with five loaves and two fishes; yea, had we been partakers ourselves of this miraculous repast, we should have been like many, who really enjoyed these privileges, yet, afterwards took offence at some of his words, which they called hard sayings, and *walked no more with him*.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Multitudes, after having been miraculously fed in the Wilderness, attempt to take CHRIST *by Force, and make him King: He shuns their importunity, by withdrawing himself from them: He walketh on the Sea to his Disciples: He saves Peter, who desired to accompany him, but was sinking for want of Faith.* CHRIST *disputes with the Jews in the Synagogue of Capernaum, and declareth himself to be the Bread of life: He goes to Jerusalem at the Passover; then returns to Galilee, and reproves the Pharisees for their Superstition.*

WHEN the wondering multitudes had partook of the miraculous banquet, prepared for them by our great Redeemer, a sudden flow of gladness and elevation of mind ran through the desert; every eye was fixed on the great Founder of the feast; every heart was glad, and every tongue resounded his praise.

And now, being thoroughly convinced, that he was their promised Messiah, and having no notion of the reign of the Messiah, but that of his setting up a temporal kingdom, they reverenced him as the great deliver of their nation, and stood determined, immediately to make him King, whether he consented to it or not. Loud acclamations resounded through the woods and wilds, and the voice of exultation and triumph ran along the side of the mountain where the miracle had been performed: the disciples seemed to join with the multitude in their desires, and every thing was preparing to proclaim him King.

JESUS, to prevent the execution of their design without their perceiving his intention, sent his disciples away in a boat, with orders to sail to Bethsaida. The multitude were very willing to let the disciples depart, when they saw that JESUS did not go with

them; perhaps, they imagined, that the disciples were sent to provide such things as were necessary against he assumed the kingdom: nor did they resuse to disperse when our Lord dismissed them, no doubt, designing to return in the morning; which, we find, was really the case.

Having thus sent the disciples, and the multitude away, JESUS ascended to the summit of the mountain alone, spending the night in heavenly contemplation, and ardent prayers to his almighty Father.

But the disciples meeting with a contrary wind, could not continue their course to Bethsaida, which lay about two leagues northward of the desert mountain, where the multitude had been miraculously fed. They, however, did all in their power to land as near the city as possible: but a tempest arising they were tossed all night on the tumultuous sea, without being able to make the desired port. At the conclusion of the fourth watch, which was about five o'clock in the morning, they were advanced no further than about a league from the shore; they were tossed by the foaming waves, and opposed in their course by the stormy wind; and, though they toiled hard, had no prospect of reaching the place where they desired to land.

Our Lord had, from the mountain, beheld the distress of his disciples, and was now coming to their relief, though they had not the least expectation of his presence. Thus the Christian, when storms and tempests of trouble and affliction overtake him, is too prone to forget his almighty support, and overlook the promise of his great deliverer: but, it would be well for him to remember, that the blessed JESUS beholds every particular of his distress, and hath *not forgotten to be gracious*, but in his own time and way, will certainly appear in all his mightiness to save and work out his deliverance. Nor ought it to be forgotten, that the time when human wisdom fails, when our distresses

and trouble arises to its highest pitch, when there appears no refuge, no help, no deliverer, then is the time for a God to manifest his divine power; and, at such a time, he hath often been found to be nigh at hand, and hath brought deliverance to his people in the most wonderful and unexpected manner.

Thus the disciples, when tossed by the mighty tempest, and in danger of being swallowed up by the foaming seas, saw their divine master at a distance, walking upon the frothy surface of the mighty waters; they saw, but they knew him not: nor were they convinced by his nearer approach, but thinking they had seen an apparition, shrieked with fear. Their terrors, however, were soon at an end; with kind compassion, and condescending goodness, in his well known voice, the blessed JESUS dispelled their fears with these words, *Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.* No sooner had our great Redeemer uttered these words, than every fear vanished, and satisfaction and joy filled every heart. Peter was so elated with the sight of his Master, and so overjoyed to see him walking on the sea, that he felt in his mind a strong desire to accompany him; and, accordingly, begged his master to permit him to come upon the water.

Our great Redeemer having, with condescending goodness granted his request, he left the boat, and walked on the surface of the sea; and some time continued the miraculous course, wondering at himself, and rejoicing in the power of his master. But the storm increased, the whistling winds roared around him, and the wild surges tossed their raging heads on high, and dashed about their foam; so that it was with the utmost difficulty that he kept on his feet. Peter was not so strong as he imagined; his presence of mind forsook him; his faith failed; he forgot the presence of his divine master, and he began to sink in the mighty waters. In this extremity, he looked earnestly for his divine supporter, and upon the brink of being swal-

ed up, he cried, *Lord save me!* His kind, compassionate master, immediately relieved him; *he stretched out his hand and caught him;* at the same time, gently rebuking his staggering resolution and wavering faith, he said unto him, *O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

The case of Peter should be a standing warning to the Christian, and excite him to be very cautious of putting a vain confidence in his own strength. Peter thought that he could endure all things in the company of his master, and while he felt his heart warm, he supposed that his resolution and courage would bear him above every fear. But on this, as well as on a future occasion, which will hereafter be remarked, he found himself mistaken. When he perceived the storm to increase, and foaming billows rage more horribly than before, his fears suggested, that either his master would be unable or unwilling to support him amidst the furious blasts of the tempest. He had, on various occasions, beheld the divine power and goodness of his master, and his fears were unreasonable, and he was justly to be blamed; because the same power which had before been so fully manifested, and which now had enabled him to walk on the sea, was able to support him there, notwithstanding all the horrors of the storm.

Peter might have reasoned thus, had he been in his right mind; but his fear prevailed, his courage and resolution, which he depended so much upon, forsook him, and he began to sink. Thus the Christian, when he enjoys the presence of his Saviour, thinks that he can *endure all things;* and concludes, that *his mountain stands strong, and he shall never be moved:* but, when affliction and trouble arise, he has a very different view of things; when great dangers are before him, and the boisterous waves of disappointment, vexation, and distress, roar around him, he is very prone to be disheartened, and to think, that he shall certain-

ly be swallowed up, that God hath forsaken him, and will be favourable no more. Such are too often his sentiments, and, if the divine hand of his Saviour did not hold him out, he would, like Peter, sink in the mighty water.

This miracle of our exalted Redeemer's walking on the sea, seems to have astonished the disciples more than any which had been before it; for though they had so lately seen the miracle of feeding the multitude with five loaves, it did not appear to have such an effect on their minds, as this last manifestation of his divine power; for now, with the utmost veneration, gratitude, and joy, they *came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.*

Nor was walking on the sea, the only miracle which our Redeemer wrought at this time; for we are informed by the evangelists, that as soon as their almighty master, and his relieved disciple, were received into the ship, the vessel was instantaneously transported to its intended port. *Then they willingly received him into the ship; and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.*

It was in the country adjacent to Capernaum, that our great Redeemer landed; and, as he had not been in that neighbourhood since his visiting Nazareth, the country people, flocked about him in great numbers, bringing their sick and diseased, which the divine physician immediately healed: and, as it had been a considerable time since he had been in that country, they crowded around him in such numbers, that he could not pay a particular attention to every object of distress; but they had so great an opinion of the healing virtue, which he so eminently possessed, that they besought him, *that they might only touch the hem of his garment; and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.*

It hath been before related, that after CHRIST had fed the multitude in the desert, he dismissed them; but though they dispersed at his command, they did not return to their habitations; for, perceiving that the disciples were sent to the other side of the lake, and that JESUS stayed behind, they probably concluded, that they were sent to provide necessaries for their master's assuming the kingdom; though he had modestly declined that high dignity in the evening, they were encouraged to hope, that he would accept of it the ensuing day. This expectation, it may be supposed, induced them to lodge in the solitary wilderness, and shelter themselves in caverns of the rocks and mountains, though they were very much incommoded by the raging of the storm.

When morning arrived, the multitude left the places of their retreat, and searched for our Redeemer in every part of the desert mountain: they saw him ascend to the summit the foregoing evening, and were very much surprised that he could not be found; but having wearied themselves in an unsuccessful search, they probably concluded that he had departed in some boat which belonged to the sea of Tiberius, that had been forced by the storm to take shelter in some creek, at the foot of the mountain. With this expectation, they departed to Capernaum, where they found him in the Synagogue, teaching the people; and, with a mixture of joy and surprise, asked him, *Rabbi, when comest thou hither?* To this question our great Redeemer answered, that they did not follow him because they were convinced by his miracles of the truth of his divinity, but because they had been miraculously fed: *Verily, verily, I say unto you*, said he, *ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.* Hereby our great Redeemer intimated that their views in following him were low, selfish, and sordid, and far below what might be expected from the Messiah's kingdom. Food for the body is of small consequence, when compared

with those blessings which promote the welfare of the immortal soul. It was not mere animal food which the Son of God came down from heaven to bestow, but that divine wisdom and grace which would lead the immortal mind in the paths of eternal happiness; and therefore, he exhorted them not to follow him for common food, but for that meat which endureth to everlasting life. *Labour not*, said he, *for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

The Jews, if they had attentively considered the writings of their prophets, where divine wisdom and knowledge are frequently held forth, under the metephors of meat and drink, might easily have understood what our Saviour meant by *the meat which endureth unto everlasting life.* But their popular notions of a temporal dominion, led them into the idea of some coporeal food, which the Messiah would give them to enable them to pursue the designs, and establish the glories of his kingdom. It is, therefore, no wonder that they asked him, what they should do to erect the Messiah's kingdom, and obtain that wonderful bread, which, he said, God had commissioned him to bestow.

The minds of the Jews were filled with vast conceptions of the splendour and glory of the Messiah's reign; as they expected that CHRIST was about to establish his great empire, doubtless they imagined he would have given proper directions for their rising against, and opposing the Roman power, as the first step towards raising that dominion which had been so long promised to their nation. But our great Redeemer, to convince them of their mistake, and inform them what God really required of them, in order to erect the Messiah's kingdom, told them, that the way to obtain favour of the God of Israel, was to believe in the person whom he had sent. The Jews

were exceedingly offended at this unexpected answer, and seemed determined not to receive CHRIST as their Messiah, because he declined all means of establishing a temporal kingdom: as, therefore, he appeared in a character so contrary to their expectations of the manifestation of the Messiah, they required him to produce some signs, which might demonstrate that he was greater than Moses, or any of the old prophets. As to the miracle of feeding the multitude, they supposed, that such a pre-eminency could not be gathered from thence, because Moses had fed their whole nation with manna in the wilderness, which they insinuated, was a greater miracle than CHRIST's feeding ten thousand persons in the wilderness. *What sign sheweth thou then*, said they unto him, *that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.* To this objection, our Lord replied, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father gave you the true bread from heaven.*

The manna which sustained the Israelites in the wilderness, was not the production of Moses but the gift of God; it was not sent as an evidence of Moses, being a great prophet, but was intended to carry on the designs of divine providence, in the support of that peculiar people, and to be an emblem, or representation of that true spiritual, heavenly bread, which God hath given for the spiritual life of all who believe in his Son.

Some of the audience, who had listened with great pleasure, to the description which our Lord had given of the cœlestial bread, were possessed with an earnest desire to be partakers of so great a blessing: and immediately cried out, *Lord, evermore give us this bread.* To which the divine Instructor replied, *I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me, shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me, shall never thirst.* But,

continued our great Redeemer, as I have often said, your nation obstinately and resolutely resists the light, and continues in unbelief, notwithstanding the manifest and glaring evidences of divine power, which you have seen, and the glorious fruits which would follow on your believing; but think not that your unbelief will prevent the rising glories of my spiritual kingdom; for many there are which my father hath given me, these shall be induced by the power of his spirit to come unto me, *and him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out: for I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent, that, of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.— And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

As the greatest part of the Jews were desirous only of temporal privileges and advantages from the Messiah's kingdom, it is no wonder they should be offended at this doctrine; they could not bear the thought, that a man who declined all earthly honours, should be supposed to be the Messiah: nor could they tell what he meant by calling himself the bread of life, and asserting that he came down from heaven. With murmuring and discontent, therefore, they hastily exclaimed, *Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and Mother we know? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?*

To these degrading expressions, our Lord thought fit to reply, that no objections arising from the meanness of his birth and education, could invalidate the testimony of the miracles which he wrought, or excuse their obstinacy and unbelief. But it was not strange, that they should oppose and resist the truth, for it required the agency of divine power to teach

them to understand what he meant by declaring himself the bread of life: and also it must be the mighty power of God, which enabled them to receive him, and live upon him as such. A believing in the Son of God, as the only Saviour of sinners, and resting upon him for life and salvation, and thereby partaking of the divine nature, and receiving spiritual nourishment from him, as the body does from corporeal bread, was not within the reach of the natural abilities of the unbelieving Jews, nor any of the human race, without divine assistance; and, therefore, our Lord told them, *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him.* And he further proceeded to inform them, that it was related in their prophets, concerning the kingdom of the Messiah, that all the subjects of that kingdom should be taught of God, *Every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.* But, continued our great Redeemer, you are not to suppose, that men will be so favoured as to see God with their corporeal eyes: *for him none hath seen, or can see:* but the happiness and glory of that kingdom will consist on believing on me, in such a manner as to receive me as the true bread of life: by this the believer will obtain a vital union with me, and draw spiritual nourishment from me; and, by that means, grow up to everlasting life.

Our Lord, having thus declared himself to be the bread of life, which came down from heaven, and shewn the way in which it is to be obtained, proceeded to examine the comparison between himself, considered as the bread from heaven, and the manna, which, in the time of Moses, the Israelites eat in the wilderness. *Your fathers,* said he, *did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give, is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

Though the Jews were no strangers to a figurative way of speaking, yet such was their blindness and perverseness, that they understood those words, and the rest of CHRIST's declaration in a literal sense, and inquired, with the utmost astonishment, *How can this man give us his flesh to eat?* But our Lord, knowing what manner of persons he was conversing with, did not think proper to explain his meaning in any other way of speaking; but continuing in the same figurative way of expression, he repeated, and affirmed what he had before asserted, *Verily, verily, I say unto you*, said he, *except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed;* meaning, that no person can obtain that eternal life, which the gospel of CHRIST makes known, but by a vital faith, which receives the Son of God, and, partaking of his divine nature, draws spiritual nourishment and life from him. 'He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.'

Our Lord proceeded to inform them, that this is the bread which he had before told them came down from heaven, infinitely superior, in its nature and consequences, to that bread which their fathers eat in the wilderness: 'for they eat the manna and are dead; but whoso eateth this bread shall live for ever.'

Such was the conference which our Saviour had with the Jews, in the Synagogue at Capernaum, which took its rise from the miraculous repast which he had so lately provided for the multitude in the desert, and thence naturally turned on bread. Though the Jews were no strangers to a figurative way of speaking, and might have found the same mode of expression in their own prophets, yet they had no clear idea of his mean-

ing, eating his flesh, and drinking his blood, they still understood literally; and, as it was a thing prohibited in the law of Moses, and abhorred by the most barbarous nations, they looked upon it with the utmost astonishment and aversion; and many of his disciples, with a mixture of dissatisfaction and surprise, said, *This is a hard saying; who can hear it?* Our Lord, perceiving their discontent, said, Are ye offended because I told you my flesh was meat, and my blood was drink; what would you think if you saw *the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.* Thus, our Lord further explained the meaning of what he had before advanced; as much as if he had said, When you see me ascend with this body into heaven, you will be convinced that I really descended from thence; and you will also perceive that you cannot eat my flesh, or drink my blood in a corporeal manner; I never intended you should think my words had any such meaning: my flesh in such case, could not be of any advantage to the sons of men; but the great blessings I have been relating, arise from receiving the doctrines I preach; to reveal these, I laid aside the glory which I had with my Father; I took upon me the veil of flesh, and assumed the nature of man: it is, therefore, entering into the spirit of these doctrines, which will bring you to eternal life; but I know your hearts are so wicked, and your prejudices so strong, that you will not receive them; nor am I disappointed in you; for, I have told you before, that *no man can come unto me, except it be given him of the Father.*

The Jews were so puzzled, confounded and offended at this discourse, that many who had professed themselves the disciples of CHRIST, departed out of the synagogue, and followed him no more. They did not understand his views, nor like his method of proceeding; nor could they perceive how a temporal

kingdom, that idol of Jewish vanity, was likely at this rate to be established: and, therefore, they could no longer acknowledge JESUS to be the Messiah, whose appearance and reign they expected so vastly different.

When the Jews were departed, our Lord turned himself to his disciples, with benignity of countenance and with an air of condescending goodness, bid them remark how degrading and shameful it was for the sons of men, to consider and reflect on the perverseness and obstinacy of the unbelieving Jews; who thought themselves offended, and made it a crime, for asserting and spreading such divine, immutable truths, and knowledge, to which *they deafened their ears*, and which affected so materially their future welfare and tranquility. Divine truths! demonstrated to them in supernatural miracles, heavenly goodness, and by the fulfilment of the predictions of the ancient prophets, out of all probability of doubt, if they would only reflect and consider on the sacred writings, and how inconsistent it ought to appear to all, who were not blinded, nor led astray by evil minded men, nor over fond of following implicitly, without considering the manifest contradictions and absurdities contained in the dogmas of their Elders; whom they themselves despised, by performing the least, and neglecting the most material rites which they contained.

Our blessed Redeemer added, that by such an ungrateful conduct towards his heavenly Father, they rendered themselves unworthy to partake the blessings arising from his divine and spiritual kingdom, to which they turned their hearts, in defiance of the precepts and examples of the Son of Man; delighting in iniquity and walking in darkness; preferring the works of feeble men, to the paths of his heavenly kingdom, turning their hearts against his ministry, by entertaining such notions of the Messiah's temporal kingdom, so inconsistent with the divine will of his heavenly Father; but that the time will come, when,

convinced of their iniquitous proceedings, they should atone for their transgressions, and the power of the Son of man will be fully known. Adding also, that because he permitted his disciples to eat with unwashen hands, which was contrary to the tradition of the elders, by which the Pharisees explained the law of Moses. Several instances of legal uncleanness were particularly stated, and forbidden by the Jewish legislature; but these, and other ceremonial performances, were multiplied in the most extravagant and ridiculous manner in those traditions, which were held in such high veneration by the Pharisees. These people, who valued themselves on an exact and scrupulous performance of every tittle of the law, considered it as a notorious offence to eat bread with unwashen hands, though at the same time, they were scandalously careless in things of the highest importance.

To shew the stupidity and folly of this conduct, our Lord answered the question of the Pharisees, by retorting on them the wickedness of their conduct in a scrupulous exactness and punctuality, in the observance of human traditions, and, at the same time neglecting the positive commands of God. *Why do you also*, said he, *transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and mother: and, he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, it is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me:* that is, whatever I might have spared for the relief of my parents, I have dedicated to God, and thus suffers his parents to want, *not honoring his father and mother he shall be free.* Thus have you, continued our great Redeemer, set aside the immutable duties of natural religion, and dared to oppose and contradict the positive commandments of God, by your ridiculous and contemptible traditions: *ye hypocrites*, said he, *well did Isaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips;*

but their heart is far from me: but in vain do they worship me, preaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Our Lord having thus sharply rebuked the Pharisees, turned to the people and explained to them the nature of the argument, and desired them to reflect on the absurdity of the doctrine of the Scribes and Pharisees. *Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man: but that which cometh out of the mouth, that defileth a man,* said he; and appealed to the common sense and understanding of mankind, for the apparent truth of this observation, desiring them to judge what contemptible hypocrites those persons must be, who could professedly neglect the great duties of morality, which are of universal and eternal obligations, and at the same time, value themselves on the exact and scrupulous performance of such a trifle as washing of hands.

The Pharisees were highly offended at our Lord, because he spake in a degrading manner of their traditions, of which, having complained with some warmth, the disciples came and informed their master. JESUS replied, that they need not give themselves any pain about the offence which that set of men had taken at his words, nor need they be afraid of their anger; for both themselves and their doctrine would soon be destroyed, for neither of them were of God. *Every plant,* said he, *which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch.*

But the disciples themselves did not fully understand, nor were they entirely satisfied with his doctrine; and Peter having desired his Lord to explain it to them, the divine instructor proceeded to inform them, that meats being of a corporeal nature, could not defile the spirit of a man, or render him polluted

in the sight of God: no real guilt can be contracted this way, except the meats are used to excess, or in direct contradiction to the command of God; and then the pollution proceeds from the man, who suffers himself to be prevailed on to transgress a positive command, and not from the meat, which as the good creature of God, is lawful to be received. Thus, that which entereth in at the mouth, doth not defile the man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, proceeding from a wicked heart, such as *evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man; but to eat with unwashen hands, defileth not a man.* Discourses like these, could not fail of exceedingly offending the proud, self-conceited Pharisees, and raising their resentment to its highest pitch: for these, and such like observations of our Lord, tended to strip them of that outside shew of sanctity and superior strictness, with which they veiled their deformity, and rendered themselves so venerable in the esteem of the vulgar Jews. These discourses therefore, and the general opposition the proud Pharisees met with from the Son of God, excited them, with the utmost pride and envy, not only to oppose his doctrine and degrade his miracles, but to attack his reputation, and plot against his life. Our great Redeemer thought it unnecessary to continue the contest with such hardened hypocrites, and determined opposers of the truth, and immediately departed out of the country.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Jesus, at the repeated Request of the woman of Canaan cures her daughter: Restores the Faculty of Speech to a dumb Man at Decapolis: Miraculously feeds the Multitude a second Time in the Desert: Warmly exhorts his Disciples to beware of the Leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees: Restores Sight to a blind Man, near the City of Bethsaida: After which, he departs into the Towns of Cæsarea-Philippi, where he approves and commends the Faith of Peter.

THE Lord of life having departed from Galilee, to evade the cruel and malicious designs of the Pharisees, retired to the borders of Palestine, and approached near to those two famous maritime cities Tyre and Sidon: but so great was the veneration of the common people, such the fame he had acquired by his kind and beneficent actions, and so many the benefits which multitudes had received from his all-healing goodness, it was not possible he should be concealed.

The first amongst the inhabitants of these Heathen cities, which implored the assistance of the Son of God, was an unhappy parent, whose only daughter had an unclean spirit, and was *grievously vexed with a devil.* Various were the discouragements which lay in the way of the afflicted matron; she was a Canaanite, one of that detested race with which the Jews would have no dealings, and with whom they disdained to converse, and had every reason to fear, that her petition would be disgusting to one of the most eminent of the sons of Israel; but, notwithstanding all these circumstances, she, as an humble petitioner, threw herself upon the tender mercies of the benevolent Son of God: strong necessity urged her on, grief and growing distress caused her to be importunate; such dreadful sorrow, such pressing distress surrounded her, it is no wonder that she

would take no denial, but pursued, with repeated petitions, the only person who was able to help. Accordingly, in the deepest humility of mind, with the most respectful reverence and submission, and the most ardent, earnest, and powerful address, she came and fell at the feet of our great Redeemer; she besought him, and cried, *Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David.* The earnestness of this woman's petition and her calling our Lord the *Son of David*, plainly indicate, that she believed him to be the Messiah; she seems to have received that faith, which was always honoured by the Son of God, and always recommended the persons who possessed it, to his first regard; and one would have expected, that such a petition would not have been rejected by that bountiful and merciful Redeemer, who *went about doing good*, and who kindly invited the weary and heavy-laden, to come to him with the promise of relief.

This woman being a native of Syrophœnicia, was no doubt, educated in all the idolatrous superstition of the Greeks; but had been enabled to believe in the Son of God, and earnestly and vehemently to apply to him for relief. And there is no reason to doubt, but that divine Person, who had enabled her to believe his ability to heal her daughter, and thus, with all her heart and soul, to implore his assistance, beheld her with an eye of tender pity, and stood determined to grant her request.

But we find, that our Lord did not think proper to let her know his intentions towards her at first. He made no reply to her petition, nor did he seem to take the least notice, either of her, or her distress; but this silence and seeming disregard, did not intimidate her so far as to induce her to desist; but excited her to press her petition with the more earnestness. She continued her cries with a vehemence which would take no denial, till the disciples were affected with her grief, and became her advocates; and they, however strong-

ly they had imbibed the prejudices of their nation, against the Gentiles, besought their Master to dismiss this troublesome petitioner, to grant her request and send her away.

But JESUS soon silenced his disciples, with an answer agreeable to their own prejudices; *I am not sent* said he, *but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* To this, the whole train readily assented; they had an high opinion of the peculiar privileges and high prerogatives of the Jews, and looked upon the Gentiles as absolutely unclean, and unworthy of the least favour from the God of Israel: so that they were entirely satisfied with this answer, and urged the matter no further.

But the woman herself was not so easily prevailed on to give up her request: it was her own cause; she had no hopes of relief from any other quarter; and that divine power which had wrought faith in her heart, and given her a full persuasion, that JESUS was the Messiah, and able to help her, had also given her strength and perseverance in her request. She took some encouragement, from observing herself the subject of conversation between CHRIST and his disciples, and, though conscious of her unworthiness to approach so illustrious a person, yet fully convinced of his divinity, she worshipped him, and prayed, *Lord, help me.*

Our Lord now condescended to speak to this humble and earnest petitioner: but his words were seemingly sufficient to have discouraged every future attempt; and though she had conceived so high an opinion of the person and condescending goodness of our Lord, his reply seems sufficient to have inspired her with bitter dislike and aversion. 'It is not meet,' said he, 'to take the childrens' bread, and to cast it to dogs.' Intimating, that the Jews were the children of God, to whom all the privileges and blessings of the covenant of Abraham belonged; and, as the

Gentiles were vile and contemptible, they could not expect to share those blessings with the sons of Israel. This answer, however severe, did but speak the language of the petitioner's humility, and therefore, it did not excite her resentment, or cause her to go murmuring away; but, acknowledging the justice of his remark, she meekly replied: 'Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.' Thus continuing the similitude which our Lord had laid down, she artfully introduced her own case, and beautifully and meekly urged her petition, at a time when, it might have been expected, she would have declined it with murmuring resentment.

Our Saviour, having thus given the woman an opportunity of manifesting the strength and steadiness of her faith, and declaring what just notions she had of her own unworthiness, and the power and goodness of our great Redeemer, now beheld her with a gracious smile, commending her faith, and wrought the cure which she had so warmly and successfully solicited in behalf of her daughter; 'O woman,' said he, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.' These gracious words were no sooner spoken, than the great event followed; and the affectionate parent had reason to rejoice, for her 'daughter was made whole from that very hour.'

This affecting and interesting relation, should excite every person in distress, especially those who are in distress of soul, to be ardent, constant and persevering in their addresses to our great Redeemer. Whatever may be the nature of our distress, and however impossible it might seem to us, that our comfort should be restored, yet there is the highest encouragement to seek to that great Person, who is mighty to save, and in his own time and way, will deliver all that commit their case to him, that believe in his name, and come to him for deliverance. Nor ought we to be discouraged by the most humbling views which we

may have of our own unworthiness: the Syrophœnician woman was an Heathen and an idolater, but yet she was not prevented by those considerations, from imploring the pity of the Son of God: she sought it perseveringly, and she found it. Thus, how lost soever we may suppose our condition to be, how desperate soever our case, we ought not to despair: the most humbling and abasing sense of our unworthiness ought not to keep us from the great Saviour of sinners, but rather urge us to follow him with our petitions, and ardently and vehemently implore his relief.

And further, from the success of this afflicted parent, we may be excited to perseverance in our petitions, though we do not meet with the desired relief, after a long continuance in our supplications: the person whose case we are considering for some time met with no answer, and was afterwards repeatedly denied; but still she persisted, and at last prevailed: so, though the Lord stands at a distance from us, leaves us to our sorrows, and does not answer our prayers in the time, or the way we might expect; still we are encouraged to continue our address: he is not offended at our importunity, he is not angry at our wants, nor weary of our cries; but the language of his words is, that we ought always to pray, and not to faint. Nor ought we to be weary of this pious practice, though the Lord may seem to deny our request; though instead of removing our affliction and distress, by his gracious smiles, he seems to frown upon us, and lays fresh burdens on our souls; though, at the time when we expected deliverance, we meet with new distresses; and, though the Lord follows us with stroke after stroke, and lays one affliction upon another; still we ought to continue our petitions, to lay them at his feet to take no rest till he answers our prayers, and to determine, that we will not let him go until he bless us. And we may rest assured that whosoever is enabled like the Canaanitish woman, thus ardently, vehemently

humbly, and perseveringly, to continue their supplications to the Son of God, will sooner or later, like her, find the desired relief.

Jesus being returned from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and taking a tour through the region of Decapolis, a man was brought to him who was deaf and dumb. The divine Physician was always ready to relieve such objects of affliction and distress as applied to him: but, as the multitude thronged about him, expecting he would soon set up his kingdom, he thought proper to take the diseased person and his relations aside from the throng; he then put his fingers in his ears, and touched his tongue, that the deaf man who could not be informed by language, might mark the great person who was his benefactor. He then *looked up to heaven, and sighed, and said unto him, Ephatha, that is, Be opened: and straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them, that they should tell no man.*

This injunction, however, was very little regarded; for, the man and his relations were so elated with the benefit they had received, and the miraculous manner in which that benefit had been conferred, their hearts were so full of gratitude to the great person from whom this unspeakable favour had been received, that they published it in every part of the country; doubtless, thinking they could not be too lavish in the praises of so great a benefactor, especially as the modesty in which he performed the miracles, fully manifested the uprightness of his intentions, and shewed, that he did not aim at popular applause, but only sought after the real benefit of mankind.

The vast crowds that gathered about our exalted Redeemer, were such as it was a trouble to bear: he therefore, to avoid such prodigious numbers of people as the fame of his miracles had brought together, re-

tired to a desert mountain near the sea of Galilee. But the solitary shades of the wilderness could not long conceal the great Benefactor of the human race: multitudes who were related to helpless objects of distress, soon discovered the place of his retreat, and brought to him from all quarters, the sick, the lame, the blind, the dumb, and the maimed. The compassionate Saviour of sinners was moved at the sight of so many piteous objects; he graciously released them from their several complaints, and restored them to health and strength. Miracles like these could not fail of exciting the veneration and wonder of the numerous spectators: but above all, the restoring the dumb to the faculty of speech filled the beholders with astonishment; for, it must be observed, that he not only conferred on these persons the faculty of hearing, and pronouncing sounds, but instantaneously conveyed into their minds, the whole language of their country: they were instantly acquainted with the various words it contained, their significations, their forms, their powers, and their uses, and, at once acquired the habit of speaking properly and fluently. This surely was sufficient to have convinced the most ignorant and stupid of the human race, that such works could be effected by nothing less than the mighty power of God; and, we are informed, that *the multitude wondered when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see, and they glorified the God of Israel.*

The attending to the various cures our great Redeemer performed, detained the multitude three days in the desert; during which time, they had consumed all the provisions which they brought along with them into this solitary retreat: no refreshment was to be procured in the desert, and the kind compassionate JESUS would not send them away fasting, lest any who had followed him so far from their habitations, should faint by the way; and therefore, he again exerted his almighty power to feed the multitude in the wilderness.

With this view, our exalted Saviour called his disciples unto him, and said, *I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint by the way.* The disciples thought they had lately had so plain a manifestation of divine power on a like occasion, seemed to wonder at the proposal: *Whence*, said they, *should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?* Their divine Master did not rebuke them for their unbelief, but calmly asked them, *How many loaves have ye?* To which they replied, *Seven, and a few small fishes.* Our great Redeemer then *commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude; and they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up the broken meat that was left, seven baskets full. And they that did eat, were four thousand men, besides women and children.*

It is not unworthy of remark, that the blessed JESUS, during the course of his public ministry, very frequently wrought his wonderful works, and published his divine discourses in the silent retreats of the wilderness, and the solitary shades of the desert. Here he was followed by great numbers, who were diseased either in body or mind, and who came after him with a sincere desire of receiving benefit, either from the miraculous powers of healing which he possessed, or from the heavenly doctrines which he taught: and, were not sincerely desirous of receiving instruction, would endure the hardships to which they were frequently exposed in the wilderness, where they were sometimes two or three days without food: so that we may observe the wisdom of our great Redeemer, who took this method to collect together, the honest, plain-hearted part of the nation, who were more likely to be affected with his miracles, and profit by his instructions, than the proud rulers of the people, or the haugh-

ty and opulent inhabitants of the crowded cities, and it may be further remarked, that our heavenly Instructor chose these desert places and obscure retreats, that he might have the opportunity of conveying his divine doctrines to the persons whose hearts were prepared to receive them, without opposition from the proud self-conceited Scribes and Pharisees. How happy were the people who thus sat under the divine instructions of the Son of God! who left the busy, bustling scenes of folly and dissipation in the crowded city, and retired to the silent and solitary shades of the desert, to attend to those things which concerned their everlasting peace; thus exchanging the loud roar of laughter and folly, for the calm dictates of eternal wisdom; and, giving up the *bread that perisheth*, for that *which endureth to everlasting life.*

After having miraculously fed the multitude, JESUS departed to the territory of Magdala, and appeared in a province of that country, called Dalmanutha. The Pharisees, having heard that he had again fed the multitude, followed him there; for they feared that the common people would be convinced by his miracles, and acknowledge him to be the Messiah; and they were determined to oppose him with all their might, and openly and publicly confute whatever he advanced, with a view to prevent the nation from owning him under that character.

In order to this, they boldly demanded of him a sign from heaven, to make it plain, beyond all contradiction, that he was a greater prophet than Moses. JESUS replied, by rebuking their blindness and folly, who, by observing the face of the sky, could distinguish the signs of fair and rainy weather, with a precision which was fully manifested by the event; but, at the same time, they were so blind and foolish, they could not perceive the evident manifestation of the fulfilment of the prophecies respecting the Messiah, nor distinguish the signs of those times which they so

ardently expected and desired. Had the Pharisees duly attended to the evidences which our Lord produced to prove his divine mission, and examined them with the same care as they did the face of the sky, when they predicted the fairness or foulness of the weather, they would doubtless have been convinced of the truth: but their obstinate and inveterate prejudices, prevented their receiving the Redeemer of Israel, and filled their hearts with so much pride and envy, that our divine Instructor would not attempt their information and conviction; but fetching a deep sigh, because of the hardness of their hearts, he declared, that their expected sign should never be given them; and further observed, that the only sign which Divine Providence would allow them, was that of his own resurrection from the cold regions of the dead, in which dark abodes he should be no longer held, than the prophet Jonah was in the belly of the whale. This miracle of our Lord's resurrection, was a sign greater than any which had formerly been shewn by the ancient prophets, and was justly insisted on by our great Redeemer, to prove that he excelled and was far superior to them all: *A wicked and adulterous generation*, said he, *seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.*

Having given this answer to the Pharisees, our Lord departed with his disciples, and went by sea to Bethsaida. During this short voyage, he cautioned his disciples to beware of the doctrine of the Scribes and Pharisees, which he introduced under the metaphor of leaven, described its wide-spreading contagion, and pernicious influence on the minds and actions of men. These hypocrites, valued themselves for their zealous attachment to a religion, which consisted in the scrupulous observance of frivolous tradition, while they neglected the immutable duties of natural religion, as well as the weightier and more important precepts of the law: but the disciples, having forgotten to take

bread with them in their voyage, thought our Lord introduced the discourse of leaven, to caution them against procuring it of the Heathens, or Samaritans; for, though their Master had so lately fed the multitude in the desert, they had forgotten his miraculous power, and seemed not to be sensible, that he who had fed ten thousand persons with five loaves, was able, at all times, to provide for their necessities.

Having crossed the lake, and landed at Bethsaida, there was brought to our Lord a blind man, and he was earnestly entreated to restore him to sight. He received the petition with his usual kindness, and taking the man by the hand, he led him out of the city; then he spit in his eyes, and laid his hands upon him, and asked him, if he saw any thing: to which the man replied, *I see men as trees walking*: which words very properly express the indistinctness of his sight: JESUS then laid his hands on him a second time, and he was immediately restored to clear, distinct, and perfect sight.

It is proper in this place to be remarked, that the inhabitants of Bethsaida had, by their ingratitude, impenitence, and unbelief, greatly provoked our great Redeemer; and it may be said of this city, as it was of another, *he would not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief*: and this, no doubt, was the reason why he would not perform this miraculous cure in the city, but led the blind man into the fields; and soon after departed into the territory of Cæsarea-Philippi.

Being retired into this country, our Lord thought proper to try the faith of the apostles; not that he did it for his own information, but that it might be manifest to themselves that they believed in the Lord. With this view, he asked them, *Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?* I answer to this question, the disciples replied, *Some say that thou art John the*

Baptist; some, Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. The people in general, were convinced that Jesus was a great prophet; but though they were convinced of this, they did not acknowledge him as the Messiah. The reason of their mistake is very apparent: they expected that the Messiah, when he appeared, would assume the honors, grandeur, and power of a temporal kingdom; but, as JESUS disclaimed and declined all earthly honors, they could not receive him under that character. JESUS, therefore, gave the disciples an opportunity of declaring what their conceptions were of his person and character; and, with this view, he asked them, *But whom say ye that I am?* To this question, Peter immediately replied, *Thou art Christ the Son of the living God.* With a condescending smile, our Lord accepted the title, and, to testify his approbation of Peter's faith, immediately replied, *Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* Our great Redeemer, then alluding to the name of Peter, which signifies a rock, led him, and the rest of the disciples, to a view of that eternal Rock, on the faith he had before expressed, and the whole church of CHRIST rests, as on a sure foundation. *And I say unto thee,* said he, *that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

It cannot, without great absurdity, be concluded, that Peter was the rock on which CHRIST declared he would build his church: weak indeed, and easily assaulted and overcome by the powers of hell, would the noble fabric be, if it rested on any creature; and much more so, was it supported by a weak, mutable and fallible man: it is therefore manifest, that CHRIST himself is the Rock, on which his universal church, containing the whole number of his redeemed, is erected; and this is a foundation which will stand for ever: not all the powers of earth and hell, can shake the immovable basis of this rock: and whoso-

ever is so happy as to be fixed on this foundation, need not fear the dreadful earthquake, the rushing inundation, the raging tempest, or the devouring flame: not all the rage and confusion of a tumultuous world, can hurt such a person as this: but he may stand secure amidst the last convulsions of expiring nature, and behold, without fear, "the wrecks of matter and the crush of worlds."

But our Lord proceeded to shew the favourable regard which he had for his disciples, and the gifts which he would bestow upon them; and, therefore, he adds, *And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*, Matth. xvi. 19. As Peter had spoken in behalf of himself and the rest of the apostles, so our Lord lays down these gifts which were common to all: for the same words, with very little variation, are applied to the whole number, in Matt. xviii. 18, and in John xx. 23. They cannot be supposed to contain a declaration of any superiority assigned to Peter over the rest of the apostles; for, it is evident, that, when they afterwards disputed on this head, and held any contention amongst themselves, who should be greatest, they were always reproved by their Master: nor can we find, that the rest of the apostles ever confessed any such superiority, or that Peter ever claimed it.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven being given to the apostles, by a very easy and beautiful figure, represents the success of their ministry. The kingdom of heaven, in the language of the evangelist, is the kingdom of grace, or the dispensation of the glorious gospel: and what can be more natural, than to say, that the keys of the kingdom of heaven are given to them who open those noble truths to the sons of men. And when it is said, that whatsoever the apostles bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; it evidently relates

to the divine approbation of those regulations and restrictions, which the apostles should establish in the church; for binding and loosing, are frequently used in the talmudical language, to represent the allowing or forbidding particular sentiments and practices; so that, from the whole, we may conclude, that however our Lord approved or applauded Peter's faith and zeal, he did not, by these declarations, intend to give him any pre-eminence or authority over the rest of the apostles.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHRIST *informs his Disciples of his sufferings and Death: He declares, that he shall judge the World, and gives a description of the last Judgment: He is transfigured in the presence of three of his Apostles: At the foot of the Mountain of Transfiguration, he cures a Youth, who had a dumb and deaf Spirit: And, returning to Capernaum, pays the Roman Tribute, with a piece of Money, taken out of the mouth of a Fish by Peter, agreeable to his Master's Direction.*

THE disciples, as they still retained their expectations of a temporal kingdom, were, doubtless, highly elated with the discourse of their Master, which they had lately heard; giving them the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and enabling them to bind and loose with such authority, were very agreeable to them, and, it is to be supposed, that they explained these grants to mean some great temporal powers and honours they were to be invested with. Their divine Leader, to abate their high swelling conceits, and to lead them into clearer views of the nature of his kingdom, and the final issue of his ministry amongst the Jews, informed them that it was appointed in the eternal councils of his Father, that he should be rejected by the rulers of Israel, persecuted with the utmost malice, followed with false accusations, and, at last, put to death as a malefactor, with circumstances of the greatest cruelty and public shame.

The disciples were exceedingly alarmed at this prediction of their Master; he had just before accepted the title of the Messiah, and declared, that he would bestow high honours, peculiar privileges, and extraordinary powers on his apostles; and his now declaring, that he should be arraigned, condemned, and put to death as a malefactor, was so contrary to their expecta-

tions, that they thought it impossible to be true. Peter, who was of a warmer temper than the rest, heard his Master talk of dying at Jerusalem with the utmost astonishment, and could not forbear hinting, that he did not believe it to be true; and he proceeded to blame his Master, for mentioning any such thing. For this boldness, our Lord sharply rebuked him: *Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me; for thou favourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

It was the false notions of the nature of the Messiah's kingdom which Peter had imbibed, and his love to the world, and desires after its grandeur and glory, which induced him to utter that imprudent language, which brought so severe a rebuke from his Master. It was, therefore, a lesson, which our Redeemer, at this time, thought peculiarly proper to inculcate, that all who would afterwards obtain that glory which belonged to the subjects of his kingdom, must deny themselves; that is, they must always be ready to give up every worldly pleasure, every thing which tends to gratify the senses, and even life itself, whenever the cause of CHRIST required it. And he informed them, that whosoever pursued the glory and blessedness of his kingdom, in such a way as to be likely to obtain it, must expect to meet with trouble, vexation, disappointment, affliction, and distress: for, our Lord declared, that he who would be his disciple, must take up his cross daily, and follow him.

Our Lord thus opened to his disciples the true nature of his kingdom, and let them know, that it was quite the reverse of what they had expected: for though they had undergone many afflictions, difficulties, and trials, there were greater and more severe exercises of their patience and fortitude still to come; these it would be in vain to attempt to shun or evade, for they must follow their Master, in the foot-steps of his affliction, which, if they attempted to shun, they

would fall into greater evils; but those who persevered in the way of their duty with patience and fortitude, though they might lose their temporal lives, they would certainly gain an happy immortality: *For whosoever*, said he, *will save his life, shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

Our great Redeemer, having explained to his attentive disciples, the usage they must expect to find from the world, and the reproach, trouble, affliction, and variety of distress which they must expect to go through; then thought proper to change the scene, and represented to them the grandeur, glory, dignity, and majesty in which he should appear, when those sufferings were at an end: *For the son of man*, said he, *shall come in the glory of his Father: and then he shall reward every man according to his works.* This consideration might have been abundantly sufficient to quiet their minds, and reconcile them to the various difficulties, troubles, and afflictions which lay before them. Then their despised Master will appear in greater glory and dignity than the most pompous earthly prince; he will assume the birth-right of the skies, and sit as the supreme judge of heaven and earth: then will his enemies meet with the punishment which they have so justly deserved, and his friends most assuredly receive their eternal reward; but those who, through fear of the difficulties and troubles which lay before them, have deserted his cause, will find themselves deserted, and finally rejected at that awful day; for said our great Redeemer, *Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

As this is the first time which our exalted Redeemer

mentioned this great event to his disciples, it may not be amiss to take a short view of this grand, magnificent, awful, and most interesting scene. As the Son of God is the exalted person who shall judge the world in righteousness, let us, for a moment, contemplate the glory, grandeur, and dignity in which he will appear: he himself declares, that he will appear *in the glory of his Father, and with the holy angels:* he will appear arrayed in the majesty of that God, who dwells in light, and whose glory no mortal can approach; not the blessed inhabitants of the heavenly world, can bear the blaze of that boundless glory which surrounds the eternal throne, but veil their faces in the presence of that God, who dwells in light, and fills the heavenly regions with the boundless blaze of uncreated brightness. How small, how dim a speck is the sun, when compared with the eternal fountain of light, or with the brightness of that God, who pours the beamy radiance from world to world, and could, with one ray of glory darted from his throne, light up a thousand suns.

In this boundless brightness, and majestic pomp, will the Son of God appear. Ah! how unlike the despised Galilean; how unlike the person, who groaned and bled on Calvary! Not now attended with twelve weak disciples, twelve mean, illiterate, fishermen; but surrounded with myriads of celestial spirits, and numberless hosts of mighty angels. With what celestial pomp, with what unutterable brightness, they descend through the sky, while the sun, overpowered with excessive light, shrinks, and disappears; and the whole bright assembly descends from heaven *with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God.* The trumpet, with tremendous roar, resounds through the regions of the dead: the dead awake and rise; some exulting with joy at the sight of their Saviour, and others terrified, confounded, and filled with inexpressible horror, at the sight of their judge: the great and mighty, the rich and noble, warriors,

captains, princes, and potentates who ruled the world, and did what they pleased amongst the sons of men, now have lost all their honours and command, and are filled with the utmost consternation, amazement, and dismay: they cannot bear the brightness of the Judge, they would plunge into eternal darkness, to avoid his piercing eye, and they call upon the rocks and mountains to fall on them, *and hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand.*

However reluctant, they are forced to appear: urged by strong necessity, and driven by frowning angels, they crowd to the bar, and stand, trembling and astonished, on the left-hand of their Judge. The elect of God, gathered by angels from the uttermost parts of the earth, are placed on the right-hand; they lift up their heads with joy, and, beholding the great Judge of heaven and earth, with exultation and transport, can say, *This is our God, we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in him.* And now the time is come, when flagrant outrageous vice shall be thrown down and despised, oppressed, afflicted virtue shall be exalted; now is the time, when the mysteries of Providence shall be unveiled, when all the clouds and darkness, which surrounded the ways of God, will be cleared away, and the wisdom, justice, and goodness of the divine conduct, fully vindicated, both in those who are saved, and those who perish: now the church of CHRIST, his spotless bride, purchased with his blood, shall appear in all her glory and beauty, all vain hypocritical pretenders will be exposed, and every thing that offendeth, done away.

An awful silence is proclaimed; the books are opened; the secrets of all hearts, and every dark deed which had been carefully concealed, are brought to light, and then the exalted King of the universe, who sits in Judgment, proceeds to pass that sentence, which

must stand for ever. With looks of the most kind, condescending goodness, and unspeakable complacency and delight, he first beholds the happy heirs of life and glory, who had been enabled, by his grace, to believe in him for life and salvation, and bring forth such fruits of righteousness, as were honorable to his cause: these happy souls look up to their Judge, with such emotions as are above description, and, with inexpressible joy, hear him pronounce this heart-expanding sentence, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; for I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me.*

The redeemed of the Lord, with ineffable joy, receive the approbation of their Judge; but their meek and humble hearts will not take any praise to themselves, nor ascribe the happiness they are going to receive to any thing done by them; and therefore, they meekly reply, 'Lord when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee.' Our Lord approves and commends their humility, but at the same time, to let the whole assembled world know, how kindly he accepted of every instance of the kindness and benevolence they had shewn to his people, he adds, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

The Judge then changes his countenance, and, with a look of indignation and rising wrath; which pierces through the inmost soul, he beholds the guilty wretches, who stand trembling at his left hand: filled with conscious guilt, and all the agonies of raging despair, they stand expecting their final doom, while these accents

break from the lips of their angry Judge: 'Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not.' The wicked, however conscious of guilt, not recollecting the precise acts of kindness and contempt of the Son of God, here literally specified, are emboldened to reply. *Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?* However willing they may be to justify themselves, our Lord well knows the naughtiness of their heart, and is fully acquainted with their evil deeds, and, therefore, he confounds them for ever with this reply; 'Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.'

The final and eternal sentence thus passed, the execution immediately succeeds: a legion of mighty angels drive the black, horrid train of trembling sinners from the judgment seat; and, caught in a fiery tempest, they are precipitated into their dreadful place of punishment; the gulph of eternal horror and despair stretches wide its burning jaws to receive them at their fall: and they are tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.

Meanwhile, the friends and favourites of the eternal king, are conducted to the paradise of God, and safe lodged in the realms of eternal blessedness and rest: these happy realms, formed by the eternal God for the abode of his people, contain every thing which can satisfy the pure desires of an immortal spirit, and fill the soul with holy and ever-growing delight; now every fear, every sorrow, and every sin is done away and the happy inhabitants of this glorious place, drink

full streams of bliss, and partake of those joys which proceed from the throne of God, and of the Lamb: now the redeemed of the Lord, forming one vast, one happy society, dwell in that splendid city, where the full glory of the eternal God is manifest in that exalted Saviour, who is emphatically styled, 'the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.' Here every happy believer in the Son of God dwells in the presence of his Saviour; beholds this supreme object of his love, face to face, and is clothed by him in the beauty and glory of immortality. But all description fails: the human mind, in its present beclouded state, cannot bear the blaze of immortal glory, nor receive any adequate ideas of that boundless bliss, which the Lord will bestow on his people: *For eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared for those that love him.*

As this doctrine of CHRIST's being appointed the universal Judge of heaven and earth, might seem incredible to the disciples; especially, as our Lord had but just before given them the humbling account of his sufferings and death; he proceeded to inform them, that some who heard him speak, should see so much of his glory and his kingdom while they lived, as should convince them, that his declaration was true: *Verily, I say unto you*, said he, *there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.* Agreeable to this prediction, the disciples lived to see the transfiguration of their Master, and to be witnesses of his glorious resurrection, and his triumphant ascension into heaven; they lived to see the descent of the Holy Ghost, and the doctrines of the gospel propagated in various remote parts of the world; and some of them lived to see that awful and ample display of divine vengeance, manifested in the destruction of that unbelieving race, who were the professed enemies and murderers of the Lord of life, and that wicked city where he was crucified.

The first of these great events succeeded the declaration in about six days, when our great Redeemer being with the multitude in the country of Cæsarea-Philippi, he left them in the plain, and, accompanied by Peter, James and John, ascended an exceeding high mountain. In this solitude, while our Lord was praying, he was transfigured; his face assumed a glorious radiance, and emitted a beamy brightness, not inferior to the sun shining in its strength; his garment shone with a snowy whiteness, far beyond any thing which human art could produce, and, like the fair beams of the morning light, glowed with a sweet refulgence, not inferior to the brightness of his countenance. Thus, for a short time the Son of God appeared in his native glory, and the majestic brightness of his divinity shone through the veil of his human nature. To heighten the solemnity of the scene, Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, and Elijah, the great prophet of the Lord, and supporter of the law, appeared in the beauties of immortality, and shone in those robes with which the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem are adorned.

It appears that the disciples, being heavy with sleep at the time of prayer, did not see the beginning of this glorious scene; they, however, awaked in the utmost surprise, to behold the place shining with heavenly glory; they had lost the first part of this bright display of our Redeemer's divinity, and of the conversation he held with the two great prophets who came down from heaven on this great occasion; but they heard so much, as gave them to understand, that these glorious persons had been talking of those things which their Master had lately informed them of. His sufferings and death, which would soon be accomplished at Jerusalem, though they appeared to them of such an humbling nature, and contrary to the character of the Messiah, they found were not unworthy the contemplation of the greatest personages of the heavenly world; and though the mentioning them, had lately

given such offence to Peter, he perceived that they were spoken of by persons of superior dignity and understanding, as highly honorable to the character of his Master. But the feeble nerves of the three disciples could not bear the blaze of heavenly glory; they were amazed, confounded, and terrified, and scarce knew where they were, or how they ought to behave: but the forwardness of Peter's disposition prompted him to say something on the occasion, though he considered not the propriety or tendency of it: *Master*, said he, *it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

Peter having beheld such glory as never before darted on mortal sight, and seen his Master assume an appearance of grandeur and majesty, far beyond his most sanguine expectations, concluded, no doubt, that JESUS had now taken upon him his proper dignity, and that the temporal kingdom, which he had so ardently desired, and impatiently expected, was now actually begun; especially as Elias, according to the prophecy of Malachi the prophet, had made his appearance; he no doubt, concluded that he was come from heaven to assist in the rearing the Messiah's kingdom: Peter, therefore, thought it highly necessary to provide some accommodation for his Master, and his noble companions; perhaps he intended to bring the rest of the disciples, and the multitude, who were waiting below, to behold the peerless glory of their Master, and his august assistants; this he thought, would be much better, and more honorable for him, than being put to death at Jerusalem, or suffering those things which had been the subject of the late heavenly conversation; the design of which, Peter, at this time, could not comprehend: but, *while he yet spake, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*

When the three disciples heard the voice, which was vastly different to any they had heard before, and, at the same time, that it seemed soft as the southern breeze, yet it was awful and majestic as the thunder's roar; impressed with trembling awe, they fell with their faces to the ground, and continued in that posture, till their compassionate Master came to them, and gently touched them, bid them arise, and not be afraid. They immediately looked about them, but the heavenly scene was withdrawn, and no person was seen but their divine Master, in the plain and unadorned form in which he appeared before he ascended the mountain.

Our Lord having continued on the summit of the mountain all night with his three disciples, early in the morning descended to the plain, and charged them to conceal what they had seen, till he was risen from the dead. He was well aware, that the world and even his own disciples, were strangers to his spiritual kingdom, and had no idea of his ascending to heaven, and being highly exalted at the right hand of God; therefore, they could not comprehend the design of his transfiguration, and it was unnecessary to publish it before his resurrection, as it could not be described; and, perhaps, would not have been believed: and the present appearance of our Redeemer, joined with the afflictions, persecutions, sufferings, and sorrows which lay before him, might still tend to prejudice the minds of the people, and prevent them from believing any account of his exaltation and glory.

Nor were the disciples at this time, able to understand the doctrine of CHRIST's resurrection; they had never learnt that the Messiah was to die, nor had they any conception of his rising from the dead; for they were fully persuaded that he was to abide for ever, and that his kingdom was to have no end. They seemed very much surprised at the departure of Elias, and at their Master's ceasing to shine in the glorious manner

they had so lately beheld on the mountain: nor could they comprehend the meaning of the prophet Malachi, who had prophesied of the coming of Elias, which their readers of the law explained to refer to a time, prior to the appearance of the Messiah. After long debating amongst themselves, they concluded to apply to their Master, to solve the difficulty, and therefore asked him, *Why say the Scribes, that Elias must first come?* To this inquiry, our Lord replied, that the Scribes had rightly explained the prophecy of Malachi, by declaring that Elias must come before the appearance of the Messiah; but at the same time, he informed them, that this great prophet had made his appearance, and had been used by that perverse generation, in the same manner as the prophets of old had been treated by their fathers: *But I say unto you,* said he, *that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed: likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake to them of John the Baptist.*

When JESUS descended to the foot of the mountain, attended by his three disciples, he saw a great multitude surrounding the nine, who had continued with the people while our Lord had been transfigured, and the Scribes disputing with them. The people seeing JESUS approach, ran to him with exultation and joy, and saluted him with the warmest gratitude, and the most respectful reverence. Our Lord having joined the company, immediately asked the Scribes, what was the subject of their debate with his disciples? to which one of the company answered *Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake unto thy disciples, that they should cast him out, but they could not.*

This answer seems to indicate, that the Scribes had

been reproaching the disciples, on account of their inability to restore the afflicted youth: and, no doubt, they rejoiced, that at last, a devil had appeared who was too hard for them, and, perhaps, would not submit to their Master. That something like this had been the subject of their conversation, is evident from our Saviour's reply: *O faithless generation*, said he, *how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?* After having spoken in this manner to the proud, self-conceited, sceptical Scribes, our Lord turned to the father of the afflicted young man, and said, *Bring thy son hither.* The afflicted father obeyed; but no sooner was the youth brought into the presence of the great ruler of earth and heaven, than the evil spirit attacked him with double fury: *the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.*

It is not to be supposed, that the blessed JESUS could not have prevented this furious attack; but he was pleased to suffer it, probably, that the minds of the spectators might be the more affected with the deplorable condition of the sufferer, and have the more just and lively ideas of that wisdom, power, and goodness, which should give him relief; and it is probable with the same views, he asked the mournful father, how long his son had been in this pitious condition? To which he replied, *Of a child. And oft times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters to destroy him: but, if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.*

It seems, that the inability of the disciples to cast out this evil spirit, had greatly discouraged the afflicted father: and the exquisite torture, and apparent agonies of his son, and the remembrance of their long continuance, had dispirited him so much, that he began to fear, that this possession was too strong for the power of JESUS himself, as the Scribe had affirmed; which was the reason of his expressing himself with so much hesitation and doubt, when he told our Lord,

how long his son had been afflicted. But JESUS, to make him sensible of his mistake, as well as gently to reprove him for his unbelief, and groundless fears, said unto him, *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.* The father, affected with this declaration, and with a heart full of tenderness and joy, at the supposed possibility of the relief of his son, replied with tears, *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.* The vehement manner in which the afflicted parent spoke these words, caused the crowd to gather about him; when *Jesus rebuked the foul spirit; and said unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee come out of him, and enter no more into him.*

The awful voice, at which all the devils tremble, had no sooner pronounced these words, than the devil, with an hideous howling, and convulsing the tormented youth in the most frightful manner, came out; leaving the youth, in a manner, senseless and motionless, as one dead. Our Lord then, taking him by the hand, restored him to life, and delivered him perfectly recovered, both in body and mind, to his father.

The nine disciples, who had unsuccessfully attempted to drive out this obstinate demon, remained most attentively silent during this transaction; doubtless they were glad to find, that this dreadful and powerful devil, was not an over-match for their Master, however they were mortified to find, that he was too hard for them. They were very desirous to know the reason, why they could not dispossess this demon, as they had done others, but did not chuse to ask their Master in the hearing of the multitude; but when he had retired, they asked him, why they failed in their attempt to restore the possessed young man? Our Lord informed them, it was because of their unbelief, *For*, said he, *if ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you.*

Our Lord then retired to the unfrequented parts of Galilee; and in this solitary retreat, he again instructed his disciples in the nature of his kingdom, and the design of his coming into the world; laying before them a view of his sufferings, death, and speedy resurrection. There, doubtless, was a necessity of inculcating these disagreeable and unpopular truths frequently on their minds; for though they must remember how sharply Peter was reproved for opposing the declaration of these events, yet our Lord's predictions concerning this matter, were very slowly received; and the national prejudices which the disciples had so strongly imbibed, which represented the grandeur, glory and perpetuity of the Messiah's temporal kingdom, would not permit them to believe it possible that he should die.

After having abode a short time in the desert part of Galilee, our Lord returned to Capernaum, the place of his general abode. Soon after his arrival at that city the tax-gatherers applied to Peter, inquiring if his Master would pay the tribute: Peter promised them that his Master would satisfy their demand; but, on further consideration, was afraid to mention the thing to him: perhaps he thought it derogatory to the dignity of so great a person to pay tribute to any potentate on earth. But, however cautious Peter might be of mentioning the affair, it was no secret to his Master, which our Lord soon apprised him of, by proposing the following question: *What thinkest thou Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own children, or strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.* Peter, by this question, was fully satisfied, that our Lord knew his thoughts, and had fully penetrated the affair which was in agitation; he was also convinced, that, as the Son of God, and heir of all things, he was under no obligation to pay tribute to the greatest monarch on earth: but our Lord, to avoid giving offence condescended to sub-

mit to the claim; and proposed to Peter the following miraculous method of raising the money: *'Go thou to the sea*, said he, *and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up, and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take and give it unto them for me and thee.*

Our Lord, by this miraculous manner of paying that tribute, which he was under no obligation to pay, teaches us, that in all common cases, we should avoid giving offence to the civil power; and rather submit to a demand, which may seem burdensome and oppressive in a small degree, than offend our brethren, or disturb the tranquility of the state. And sure it becomes the children of the Prince of peace to avoid all occasions of contention and discord, and rather give up some small part of their property, than give the rulers of the state any reason to complain. It may further be observed, that this miracle is a manifest proof of the omnipresence of the Son of God; no less a person than he, who knows all things and is present in all places, could know that the fish had the piece of money in its mouth, while it was covered with the rolling surges of the sea; and that this same fish, still holding the piece of money, would come to Peter's hook. These are most surprising events, and with the rest of the miracles wrought by our great Redeemer, blaze out like a light bright constellation, adorn his royal crown, and proclaim him the great King of the universe, the supreme Lord of heaven and earth.

CHAPTER XX.

CHRIST *reproves his Disciples for their foolish Contention about Superiority: He answereth the Petition of the mother of Zebedee's Children, and checketh the Indignation of the other Disciples thereat: He teacheth how to treat an offending Brother, and how oft to forgive him, by the parable of a King, who punished one of his Servants for refusing that Mercy to his Fellow, which he had experienced from his Lord in a larger Degree: He then goeth to Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, where he teacheth in the Temple: The Rulers send Officers to apprehend him, who being struck with his discourse, return without him, and are rebuked by the Pharisees, who chide Nicodemus for taking his part.* CHRIST *afterwards letteth go, uncondemned, the Woman taken in Adultery.*

THOUGH our blessed Saviour had lately given his disciples an affecting account of his sufferings and death; and though their minds seemed to be very much cast down and dispirited at the expectation of events, so mournful and distressing in themselves, and so contrary to their expectations; yet their grief seems to be of no long continuance, nor had they yet given up their favourite notion of the Messiah's temporal kingdom: for, not many days after, they had so far forgot the predictions of their Master, that they were engaged in a warm dispute concerning the posts of honour in that kingdom. On what grounds several of the disciples advanced their pretensions to be greatest is not related by the evangelists; but it is very plain, that those claims did not originate from any intimations given them by their Master, of his design to advance any of them above the rest; for he very severely rebuked them for their pride and folly, and they were fearful of letting him know what subject they had been disputing about.

Our Lord did not directly proceed to reprimand his disciples on account of the above conversation, but first asked them, what they were disputing about by the way? They were confounded at the question, and, as they knew it would be in vain to attempt either to evade a discovery, or to conceal the truth, they feared to return an answer. JESUS, perceiving their confusion, soon gave them to understand, that he well knew the subject of their debate, and that he highly disapproved it: having commanded their particular and earnest attention to what he was going to advance, he said, *if any man desires to be first, the same shall be last, and servant of all.* And then, to teach them the useful lesson of humility, he took a little child, and set him in the midst of them; *Verily, I say unto you,* said he, *except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

As our Lord, at this time, thought proper to discountenance all pretensions to superiority amongst his disciples, it is evident, that he had given no supremacy to Peter, when he declared his approbation of his declaration of faith, as before related. Had he, when he told that disciple, that he gave him *the keys of the kingdom of heaven,* designed to exalt him above the rest of the disciples: or had they understood his words in that sense, they could not possibly have been at any loss to know who was to be the greatest; nor is it likely they would have contended about an affair which had in the presence of them all, been finally settled by their Master: neither is it possible to suppose, that, if our great Redeemer had given the pre-eminence to Peter, he would have blamed his disciples for talking about it, and not on this occasion have confirmed his former grant.

The justice of this remark is further confirmed by

the answer which our great Redeemer gave to the wife of Zebedee, when she presented a petition to him in behalf of her sons; she had strongly imbibed the national error of the Jews, respecting the Messiah's kingdom; and, as she supposed that her sons, from their near relation to our Lord, might claim a peculiar share in his favour, she presented her request, that one might sit on his right hand, and the other on his left, in his kingdom. To this petition, our Saviour replied, *To sit on my right hand, and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.*

The rest of the disciples having heard the request, and remarked our Redeemer's reply were much offended at the pride and vanity of the brothers, and could not see any reason, why they should expect so peculiar and distinguished a mark of favour. To put an end to all contention on so weak and frivolous an account, our Lord called his disciples in such a manner as to engage and fix their attention, and said unto them, *Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles, exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them; but so it shall not be amongst you, but whosoever will be great amongst you, shall be your minister; and whosoever of you will be the chief, shall be the servant of all.*

Such is the language of our great Redeemer, who is sole king and lawgiver in his church; and may we not justly conclude, that the pretences of the church of Rome to infallibility and supremacy, which she would have us believe have descended from the apostle Peter to the pope, as his successor, have no foundation in scripture or reason, but are unjust and arbitrary usurpation, designed to advance and enrich the priesthood, and impoverish, abuse, and enslave mankind.

The exalted Saviour of mankind, having thus gently

rebuked his disciples for their eager and unabating desires after worldly grandeur, John, one of the sons of Zebedee, perhaps to give a turn to the conversation, informed his Master, that they had seen one casting out the devils in his name, and had forbidden him, because he had not joined himself to their company. To which our Lord replied, that they ought not to have forbidden him, because no person would attempt to work miracles in his name, who did not entertain a very just conception of his divinity. *Forbid him him not*, said he, *for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.*

By this language our Redeemer exhorted them to consider, that whosoever did not oppose him, may be considered as his friends; and the casting out devils in his name, would advance his reputation; and promote his interest, though the devils themselves, and the persons who rejected them, might design the contrary: he further informed them that the least degree of friendship and respect shewn to his cause, though it was no more than a cup of cold water given to his disciples, when they stood in need of such a favour, was acceptable to him, and would certainly find its full reward hereafter. *Whosoever*, said he, *shall give you a cup of cold water in my name, because you belong to Christ; verily, I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.* At the same time, our Lord gave them to understand, that the least discouragement to his servants in their duty, would be remarked, and punished with the greatest severity: *And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.*

From hence our great Redeemer took occasion to remark, that it was better and more advantageous to us, to deny ourselves the enjoyment of those things which are most pleasing to our sense, and which our corrupt affections might be as loth to part with, as with

an hand, a foot, or an eye, than by any indulgence or sensual gratification, to give offence to the disciples of CHRIST, or prevent the success of his gospel: and, as the disciples of CHRIST were appointed to preach the glorious gospel to a wicked world, to shew all nations the stupidity and folly of their idolatry, to teach the uncorrupted worship of the true God, and the practice of every virtue, JESUS exhorted them to be particularly careful of their conduct and behaviour, for, if their lives were dishonourable to the cause of the gospel, they would be useless and despised, like salt which had lost its savour. But amongst all the vices which prevail in the hearts of mankind, there is none more contrary to the nature and genius of the religion of JESUS, or more likely to prevent the usefulness of the preachers of his gospel, than a spirit of pride; of this, therefore, our Lord particularly cautioned his disciples to beware; for, he assured them, that the meanest person is an object of the paternal care of the great Creator, and is supported and defended by his particular providence; such, therefore, are not to be despised; for our Lord declared, that their angels do always behold the face of his heavenly Father.

And to shew the particular notice and care which his eternal Father takes of his people, and with what tender regard he always beholds the believers in his Son, our great Redeemer proceeded in this manner, 'How think ye,' said he, 'if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if it be, that he find it, verily, I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so, it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.'

Our Lord having declared the heavy vengeance which would certainly fall on all who injured his disciples,

and opposed the propagation of his gospel; and observed the tender care with which his Almighty Father beholds his people, and their certainty of protection and defence; he proceeds to warn them of taking their cause into their own hands, and pursuing, with hasty and unreasonable resentment, any who had offended them. 'If thy brother,' said he, 'shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican.'

Our Saviour then proceeds to inform them, that the Supreme Judge of heaven and earth will interest himself in their behalf, when they are justly offended, and the sentence which they pass on such offenders will be ratified in heaven: 'Verily, I say unto you,' proceeded he, 'whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' The meaning of this is, that if the method you take with an offending brother is blessed to the end you designed, and he is brought to a repentance, he is loosed from the guilt of his sin, and stands acquitted at the bar of supreme justice: but, on the other hand, if all methods are used in vain, and the offender still continues impenitent, and persists in his evil ways, he is bound by the chains of his guilt, and cannot escape deserved punishment.

Our blessed Saviour then proceeded to lay down some considerations, which ought to encourage good men to use their utmost endeavours to convince sinners of the error of their ways, and bring them to sincere repentance, and to offer up their earnest and persevering prayers to the God of all grace, for his divine assistance in so great a work, by which only it can be

effected: for our Lord informs them, that his heavenly Father would always hear their prayers, and grant their petitions, if consistent with the designs of his providence, and the methods of his grace. 'Again, I say unto you,' said he, 'that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven: for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'

Peter had carefully attended to the doctrine of forgiveness of injuries, as inculcated by his master; doubtless, he saw the beauty and dignity of such a rule of conduct, and desired it to be further explained: 'Lord,' said he, 'how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him, till seven times?' It seems by this question, that, however great and noble he apprehended this rule of conduct to be, he thought it was necessary to observe some restrictions in the practice of it; but his Master informed him, that it must not be limited to seven times, but carried on to seventy times seven, if the case required it.

In order to shew the beauty and dignity of this excellent moral precept, and the necessity of forgiving the greatest injuries in every case, where the offending person is sensible of his fault, and promises amendment; our Lord, by way of illustration, proposed the parable of two servants, debtors to one lord: 'Therefore,' said he, 'is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But, for as much as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant, therefore, fell down, and worshipped him, saying, lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt,

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence; and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt.'

'So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him unto the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.'

By this affecting narrative, our Lord beautifully displays the extent of divine forgiveness, and the obligations which the sons of men, to whom God hath forgiven so much, are under to forgive one another. God is the great king and sovereign of all creatures, to him all are accountable, as servants are to a master; he keeps a register of their actions, as a tradesman keeps an account of his debts, and a day will surely come when they will be called to a reckoning. The servant who owed ten thousand talents, represents every man that lives in the world: the enormous debts which men owe to their Creator, is but faintly described by that prodigious sum; for their sins of thought, word, and deed, which the most correct and regular of mankind commit, exceed all conception, and may justly be compared to the stars of heaven for multitude, or the sand on the sea shore. The plea of the insolvent debtor 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all,' is an elegant description of the expectations of men in general, to obtain the divine forgiveness, by their future good behaviour, and thinking to perform such good

deeds as may make amends for their former guilt; but the Lord, knowing how impossible it was for this servant to pay this enormous sum, had compassion on him, and freely forgave the debt. Hence we learn the freeness of divine forgiveness; it is not on account of any thing which has been done, or can be done by the sons of men, that the great Jehovah is induced to pardon their iniquities; but his forgiveness flows from the rich fountain of his own infinite mercy, that mercy which he hath magnified, and fully manifested to the world in the gospel of his Son: and whosoever is made partaker of the rich blessing of divine forgiveness, is laid under the highest obligations to forgive his fellow-creatures, and to extend that forgiveness, if required, beyond the limits prescribed by our Lord, even beyond the number of seventy times seven: but such is the corruption and depravity of the human heart, that we are too prone to forget, or carelessly overlook the mercies received, and consider not how justly the great Judge of heaven and earth might call us to a strict account for our numerous offences, while we are pursuing our fellow-creatures with implacable resentment; nor do we consider how much we are indebted to the supreme Lord of universal nature, while, like the unmerciful servant, we take our fellow-creature by the throat, with, 'Pay me what thou owest.' But whosoever duly considers the vast debt they owe to God, and are enabled to rely on his infinite mercy for forgiveness; if they have a just view of their unworthiness and insolvency, and are enabled to seek forgiveness in the way which God hath appointed, will, in a greater or less degree, be careful to cultivate a placable forgiving frame of mind; especially when they consider those remarkable words with which our Lord concludes this narrative: for having declared, that the lord delivered the cruel servant 'to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him;' he adds, 'so likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not one another your tresspasses.'

Having delivered these precepts, our great Redeemer departed into Galilee, passing through the country beyond Jordan; by that means giving the Jews, which inhabited that country, an opportunity to hear his heavenly discourses, and to receive the benefit of his all-healing power: and after having taken a tour through those distant parts, he returned to his own city Nazareth.

The feast of tabernacles now approached, when the males of the Jewish nation, capable of travelling, repaired to Jerusalem, and dwelt seven days in the tabernacles, or booths made of boughs of trees, in commemoration of their fathers having had no other habitation during their forty years sojourning in the wilderness. Some of the kinsmen of the blessed JESUS, being about to take a journey to the capital on this occasion, they desired him to accompany them thither, and openly shew himself to the whole nation of the Jews. They did not believe, that he was really the Messiah so long expected by their nation, and they condemned his conduct, as unnatural and absurd, from a person who made such pretentions: they could not conceive what induced him to spend so much of his time in deserts, and remote parts of the kingdom, while he assumed so public a character as that of the Redeemer of Israel. Jerusalem, the seat of power, the habitation of the great men of the nation, and the place of general resort, was, in their opinion, the properest place for him to publish his doctrines, and work his miracles in; these, they thought, being exhibited in public, before the great and learned men of the nation, might have a better effect, than being performed in obscure retreats amongst the ignorant and illiterate. The decision of the doctors of the law, and the great men of the nation in his favour, they thought would increase the number of his disciples, and be a means of inducing the whole nation to own him for the Messiah, whether he were really that great person or not: *Depart hence*, said they, *and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest: for there is no man that doeth any*

thing in secret, and himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.

But our Lord was no stranger to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and, therefore, he did not think proper to reside amongst them any longer than was absolutely necessary: he well knew their inveterate prejudices, their obstinacy and perverseness, and their prevailing unbelief; and was fully convinced, that they would not receive his doctrines, nor be induced by his miracles, to believe in him, but would be more likely to use all their power to destroy him, before he had finished the work, which he assumed our nature to perform: for which reasons he did not choose to accompany his relations to the feast, or go in a public manner to Jerusalem: *My time*, said our great Redeemer, to these unbelieving relations, *is not yet come: but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you: but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.—Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast: for my time is not yet full come.* This was, as though he had said, it is not expedient that I should go to Jerusalem before the feast begins: you may advance to the city whenever you please, there is nothing to make you afraid; the Jews are your friends, you have never offended them, nor have you done any thing to displease them: but the purity of the doctrine I have preached amongst them, and the plainness and freedom of speech with which I have opposed their foolish traditions, and reproved their hypocrisy, and other enormous vices, have raised their resentment, and provoked their malice to the utmost height; and, therefore, as the time of my suffering is not yet come, it is not proper for me to go so soon to Jerusalem.

Perhaps there might be another reason why our Redeemer did not choose to accompany his relations to the feast of tabernacles at this time: the vast concourse of people which annually attended this solemnity, would fill all the roads to the capital, and these gathering

around him, and attending him to Jerusalem, would have made a noise in the city, and have given fresh offence to his enemies, which might have exasperated them to that degree, that they might, as they had done before, have attempted his life, and their cruelty and rage might have prevented his doctrines and miracles having their proper effect: he, therefore, chose to continue in Galilee till the crowd were gone up to the feast, when he followed, *as it were in secret*, neither preaching nor working miracles by the way; so that no crowd followed him, nor was there any rejoicing at his approach.

As JESUS did not go publicly to Jerusalem, so neither did he, on his arrival, repair to the temple, and there preach openly to the people. This gave rise to several disputes amongst the Jews concerning his character and conduct; some affirmed that he was a true prophet, and his not coming to the feast could only arise from some accident, which had prevented him; others maintained that he was an impostor and deceiver, and though he assumed the sacred character of a prophet, he did not keep the law; nor regard the institutions which they had received from heaven.

But about the middle of the feast, JESUS appeared openly in the temple, and publicly taught the people, delivering his divine discourses with energy, force, and spirit, aad such strength of reasoning joined with such elegance of expression, that his enemies were astonished, as they knew he had not enjoyed the benefit of a learned education. *Now, about the midst of the feast, Jesus went up and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?* To this the exalted Saviour of mankind replied: My doctrine was not produced by human wisdom; the learned men and sages of this world were not my instructors; but I received it from heaven, and it is the doctrine of the great supreme, eternal Father of the universe, whose messenger I am: *My doc-*

trine, said he, *is not mine, but his that sent me.* And our Lord further observed, that it might be gathered from the manner of his teaching, that his doctrine was really divine; he sought not the praise of man, he did not stand candidate for popular applause, he did not seek to advance his own interest, but the eternal interest of mankind, and the glory of the heavenly Father: *He that speaketh of himself*, said he, *seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.*

Some of the Jews presumed to call JESUS a false prophet, because, in the porches of the pool of Bethesda, he had healed an impotent man on the Sabbath-day, which they pretended was a violation of the law of Moses, and what a good man would not be guilty of: in answer to which, our great Redeemer told them, that however they might pretend to reverence the authority of Moses and his law, they made no scruple to violate the most sacred and essential of his precepts; this was manifest in their conduct towards himself: contrary to all the principles of justice and humanity, and every law of God and man, they had resolved to put him to death; and, in order to execute their black, horrid and infernal scheme, they were now laying plots against his life.

To this charge the Jews replied, *Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee?* To which JESUS answered to this effect, I have performed a miracle, in favour of a distressed poor man, on the Sabbath-day: this you think contrary to the character of a good and pious man, and wonder how I could undertake it; but I can give you an example out of your own law, in the case of circumcision: Moses gave you that law, and you make no scruple of performing the institution on the Sabbath-day: you think yourselves justified in this, because it is a precept both of Moses and the fathers. Since, therefore, ye think yourselves bound to dispense with the strict observance of the Sabbath,

in order to perform a ceremonial precept, can you be angry with me, because I, on the Sabbath-day, have fulfilled the most sacred and immutable part of the moral law, by curing a man who was infirm in all the members of his body, and have not exerted so much bodily labour as you do in the practice of the rite of circumcision: consider therefore, the nature of the thing, be not blinded by prejudice, be no longer attached to foolish traditions, or superstitious opinions; but make use of your reason, shew yourselves men, and judge impartially: *Moses*, said our great Redeemer, *therefore gave unto you circumcision (because it is of Moses, but not of the fathers); and ye on the Sabbath-day circumcise a man. If a man on the Sabbath-day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath-day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*

Though the Jews could not answer this argument, they would not be convinced, but objected to Jesus's being the Messiah, because they were acquainted with his parents and relations: they apprehended, that when the Messiah appeared, his pedigree and relationship would not be known; and they founded their opinion on a passage in the prophet Isaiah, *Who shall declare his generation?* They were full of resentment and malice, and some of them were desirous that he should be apprehended; but Divine Providence would not permit them to accomplish their cruel purpose, because the time of his sufferings were not yet come. But though his enemies beheld him with rancour and contempt, yet many of the people, convinced by his miracles, affected by his divine discourses, and satisfied with the unanswerable reasons which he had advanced in support of his character, believed on him, and publicly in the temple affirmed that he was the Messiah. The Evangelist inform us, that *many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh,*

will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done? John vii. 31.

The Scribes and Pharisees beheld the attachment of the common people to the Saviour of sinners, with the highest indignation and contempt, and were so provoked, that they could bear it no longer; and, accordingly, on the last and great day of the feast, they met in council to consider on some means to prevent his growing popularity: the result of their deliberations, was a determination to apprehend him; and accordingly, the proper officers were dispatched from the council to arrest him, and bring him before them. While these things were in agitation in the council, JESUS was teaching in the temple, and he exhorted the people to give a diligent and unabating attention to his discourses; not only because the subject matter of them was of the utmost importance, but he informed them that their opportunity of hearing him would soon be over; *Yet a little while*, said he, *am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and ye shall not find me; and where I am, thither ye cannot come.*

Not understanding that our Saviour alluded to his death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God, whither no person in the body could follow him, the Jews were very much puzzled with this declaration, and could by no means understand the meaning of it: they could form no other conjecture concerning the meaning of these words, than that our Lord designed to leave Judea, and go amongst the Gentiles, to preach amongst their brethren who were dispersed in the neighbouring nations: but they were aware, that this conjecture did not answer to the latter part of our Lord's declaration: for though he should go amongst the Gentiles, it would not be impossible for them to follow him: they, therefore, in the utmost confusion, reasoned amongst themselves, and inquired, *Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? Will*

he go unto the dispersed amongst the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? What manner of saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.

While our exalted Redeemer was teaching in the temple, according to the annual custom, the water of the pool of Siloam was brought in. Part of this was drank in the temple with loud acclamations, in commemoration of the great deliverance wrought for their fathers, who were miraculously relieved and preserved by a stream which flowed from a hard dry rock, and revived the nation which was fainting with thirst: the other part was poured out as a drink-offering, accompanied with their prayers to the Almighty, for the former and latter rain to fall in their season; which ceremony was concluded by the whole congregation, singing this passage out of the prophet Isaiah, *With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.* chap. xii. 3.

It was the constant mode of instruction which our great Redeemer pursued, to accommodate his discourses to the particular occasion and circumstances of his hearers, and to engage and fix their attention, by alluding to occurrences and objects actually in view; and, accordingly, he took this opportunity of representing the rich blessings which sinful creatures would receive from him under the metaphor of water: and, in allusion to the ceremony which they had seen performed, *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

While our Lord was thus speaking to the people, with a beautiful simplicity, and heart-affecting strength and energy, such as never were joined before, the officers sent from the council to apprehend him, came

into the temple: before they proceeded to the execution of their mission, they staid a few moments to hear his discourse; to this they were excited by their curiosity, but his divine eloquence overcame their resentment, removed their prejudices, and melted away their rage: the harmony of his pronunciation, the beautiful simplicity, and plainness, and the amazing strength, energy, and clearness of his reasoning, displayed the beauties of divine truth, and caused them to shine on the understanding with resistless brightness; even his enemies who were sent from the council to apprehend him, were astonished and overcome: the greatness of the subject affected their minds, and its importance filled their understandings: the warmth and tenderness with which he delivered his discourses, fixed their attention and penetrated their hearts; they felt new and uncommon emotions, and overwhelmed with the greatness of their admiration, were fixed in silent astonishment; they were absolutely overcome, and could not think of executing the commission which brought them to the temple; they blamed themselves for having undertaken it, and returned to the rulers of Israel without performing it.

If we consider the remorseless disposition of the persons who are usually sent about such business, and the nature of the subject which employed our great Redeemer's eloquence, we shall have reason to join the officers in their admirations, and to acknowledge that our great Redeemer's elocution was superior to all praise: such surely that discourse must be, which addressed to others, and on a divine subject, could disarm the resolution of the most determined enemy, and penetrate the recesses of the most unfeeling heart.

Nor were the officers the only persons who were affected with this divine discourse: for the surrounding multitude were sensible of very remarkable impressions, and expressed their wonder in various conjectures; many of them declared he must certainly be one of the old prophets, and others, that he could be

no less than the Messiah himself; others, led away with the common mistake, that he was born at Nazareth, asked, with sneering disdain, if the Messiah was to come out of Galilee, when the scripture has absolutely declared, that he was to be born in Bethlehem, the native town of his father David. Thus we are informed, *Many of the people, therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth, this is the prophet: others said, this is the Christ; but some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was.* This dispute was carried to such an height, that some of them, knowing that the officers were sent to apprehend our Redeemer, threatened to lay hands on him: but divine Providence would not permit them to execute their cruel design; for though *some of them would have taken him, yet no man laid hands on him.*

The officers now returned to the council, and were asked with warmth, why they had not brought JESUS of Nazareth, whom they were sent to apprehend? They endeavoured to excuse themselves, by relating the manner in which they were overcome, and disarmed by his eloquence: *No man*, said they, *spake like this man.* But if they thought to soften the resentment of the council, by declaring what a wonderful man JESUS CHRIST was, and what an heart-affecting strain of divine eloquence flowed from his lips, they were very much mistaken: the prejudices of the rulers of Israel were too deep-rooted, and their rancour and malice too inveterate to be so easily overcome: their pride scorned to submit to the dictates of the unpopular and unlearned, and, with indignation and scorn, they replied, *Are ye also deceived! Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people, who knoweth not the law, are cursed,* They thought it a piece of the most unparalleled impudence, that the common people should presume to acknowledge JESUS to be the Messiah, when the great

doctors of the law, the chief priests and pharisees, and all the learned men of the nation, publicly opposed his preaching, defamed his character, and determined to destroy him.

But their pride and envy soon received a severe reprimand from Nicodemus, who had formerly attended on JESUS by night; and was convinced that he was the Messiah, though he did not openly confess him, for fear of the Jews. On this occasion he rebuked the pride and self-sufficiency of the enemies of JESUS, by inquiring, *Does our law condemn any man before he is heard.* They had just now condemned their officers for being ignorant of the law, when it appeared that themselves were more ignorant, by pretending to condemn a person before they had proved him guilty: they were acting directly contrary to the fundamental principles of the law of equity, at the same time that they boasted their superior knowledge of, and closest attachment to its precepts.

This sharp reproof of Nicodemus, so highly exasperated the whole council, that, with an air of indignation and contempt, they asked him, if he also was one of those mean persons who had joined together to support the pretensions of a Galilean, though the scriptures had plainly declared, that Bethlehem was the place of the Messiah's nativity: to which they added, that, if he refused to listen to them, he should search the scriptures, and he would soon be convinced, that the great prophet, mentioned by Moses, was not to be born in Galilee: *Art thou also of Galilee? said they. Search and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.*

The council soon broke up, after making this answer to Nicodemus, and our Lord, well knowing their malicious intentions, retired to the Mount of Olives, where he spent the night with his disciples; but early the next morning he returned to the temple, and taught the people.

The Scribes and Pharisees pursued him with unabating resentment, and were determined either to render him odious to the people, or an offender in the eye of the Roman governor. Accordingly, they brought before him, a woman who had been taken in the act of adultery; desiring him to declare what punishment she ought to suffer: *This woman*, said they to our great Redeemer, *was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law, commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?* Had JESUS presumed to pardon the adulteress, and inflicted no punishment on her, they would, doubtless, have represented him as a person who contradicted the law, and favored adultery, which would certainly have rendered him odious in the eyes of the people. On the other hand, had he ordered her to be stoned, it would have afforded an opportunity of accusing him to the Roman governor, as a person who stirred up the people to rebellion; the Romans having, at that time, taken the power of life and death out of the hands of the Jews. But JESUS well knew their wicked intentions, and therefore made them no answer, *but stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.* They, not satisfied, still continued pressing him to give an answer; when at last, JESUS, in allusion to the law, which ordered that the hands of the witnesses, by whose testimony a criminal was convicted, should first be upon him, said, *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* Our Lord well knew the hearts, and the secret crimes of these furious accusers, and he delivered these words in such a manner, as convinced every person present, that he was acquainted with their secret lewdness and debauchery. This sudden rebuke, had such an effect on them, that they could not reply, but immediately departed, no doubt, fearing if they had staid, JESUS would have exposed their most secret transactions and abominable crimes: they, therefore, durst not proceed in their accusation, but, *being convicted by their own consciences, went out one*

by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman, who had been *standing in the midst.* JESUS had been, all the while the Jews were retiring, stooping down and writing on the ground, as though he did not perceive what they were about: but now rising up, and looking upon the woman who stood alone, he asked her, if she had been condemned? To which she answered in the negative. Our Lord saw her covered with shame, and knowing her repentance was sincere, he looked upon her with an eye of pity and forgiveness; and dismissed her with these gracious words, *Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.*

CHAPTER XXI.

CHRIST declareth himself to be the Light of the world, and justifieth his Doctrine against the Pharisees: He promiseth Freedom, through Knowledge of the Truth, to those Jews who believed on him: Confuteth their vain Boast of being Abraham's Seed, and the Children of God: Answereth their Reviling, by shewing his Authority and Dignity; and, by Miracle rescueth himself from their Attempts to stone him: He restoreth to Sight, a Man that was born blind, who relateth to his Neighbours the Means of his Cure; and he is brought to the Pharisees, who examine strictly into the Fact, and are offended with his Acknowledgment of the divine Mission of the Author; they excommunicate him; he is received of JESUS, and confesseth him. CHRIST taxeth the Pharisees with spiritual Blindness: He declareth himself to be the Door, and the good Shepherd: Divers opinions concerning him. CHRIST reproveth the fiery Zeal of James and John against the Samaritans, who would not receive him; and proposeth Terms to three Persons, who offer to follow him: He sendeth out the seventy Disciples a second time, to work Miracles and to preach: He pronounceth a Woe against Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum: The seventy return with joy; CHRIST sheweth them wherein to rejoice: He thanketh his Father for having revealed his Gospel to the Simple only: He teacheth a Lawyer how to attain eternal Life; and, by the Parable of the good Samaritan, sheweth whom we are to consider as our Neighbour.

JESUS having, by an amazing display of his wisdom and penetration, defeated the malice and mortified the pride of the Scribes and Pharisees, and they being sent away ashamed, under a full conviction that he knew the secrets of their hearts and lives, and having, by his superior wisdom, made use of their own consciences to

defeat their cruel and villainous designs, turned to the people, and with the utmost propriety declared, that he was *the light of the world;* that light which could penetrate through the darkness of the human heart, and discover and bring to light the dark designs and wicked devices of the sons of men; that light which could pierce through the outside shew of sanctity and holiness, and discover the secret abominations of the most proud and accomplished hypocrite; and that light which could discover the paths of darkness and error, and lead those who are enabled to follow our Redeemer, in the road to eternal blessedness and rest. Hence, our blessed Saviour declared, 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' John viii. 12.

Some of the enemies of our Lord were amongst the people who heard this declaration, and they were so highly provoked, that they told him, he must be a deceiver because he boasted of himself: *Thou bearest record of thyself*, said they, *thy record is not true.* To this, the great Saviour of sinners replied, that he did not call himself the light of the world, from a principle of pride and falsehood, but it was a title that justly belonged to him, which they would acknowledge, had they conceived true ideas of the Messiah's kingdom: but their carnal views had blinded their eyes, and corrupted, and depraved their judgments, so that they did not know from what authority he had received his commission, nor whether he should return when he had executed it: *Though I bear record of myself*, said he, *yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go: but ye cannot tell whence I came, and whither I go. Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.* Nor, added he, is there any truth or justice in your remark, that I bear witness of myself, and have none to witness for me: for let it be known, that my Father is with me; and joins me in whatsoever I say or do: *And yet if I judge*, said he, *my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. It*

is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me, beareth witness of me.

The Jews then inquired, where is thy Father, the other witness to whom thou appealest? To which our Lord replied, that their conduct and foolish inquiries, sufficiently demonstrated, that they were strangers, both to him and to his Father: for, had they known who he was, they would certainly have been at no loss to know who it was that he called his Father: had they known that he was the Messiah, they must have understood that his Father was the great JEHOVAH, that all-wise and all-powerful Being, who was the great Maker, the all-wise and all-potent Preserver, the Supreme Governor, and King of the universe: *Ye neither know me, nor my Father*, said our great Redeemer; *if ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also.*

This discourse, the evangelist informs us, was held in the treasury, where the chest was placed for receiving the offerings of all who came up to worship in the temple, and must, therefore, have been a place of great resort, being frequented by all sorts of people; but, notwithstanding the public manner in which our Lord advanced his claim to the character of the Messiah, and the pride and rage of the Scribes and Pharisees, no man attempted to seize him; Divine Providence did not permit them to put their cruel designs into execution, because his hour, or the time of his sufferings and death, was not yet come.

After this discourse was ended, JESUS repeated what he had before told them, declaring that he should shortly depart from them, and that then they should seek him, and not be able to find him: *I go my way*, said he, *and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins. Whither I go, ye cannot come.* Perhaps, in these words, he might allude to the state of the Jewish nation after his death, and may be supposed to say, I soon shall depart

from amongst you, and such miseries and calamities, will overspread the land, that you will be glad of a prophet to direct your conduct, and to pray for you: the Roman armies will spread such devastation and horror over the face of your country, that you will then earnestly wish for the coming of the Messiah, in expectation of being delivered, by his power from your cruel enemy: but ye shall then find your mistake: ye shall die in your sins, and be for ever excluded the realms of blessedness and rest.

But the Jews were very far from understanding what he meant by going from them, they were so foolish as to imagine, that he designed to put an end to his life, with his own hands; for they thought the only retreat where they could not find him, must be the dark and silent chambers of the grave: *Will he kill himself*, said they, *because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come.* To this the blessed JESUS replied, your base insinuation betrays at once, the wickedness of your hearts, and the corruption and depravity of your natures: ye are from the earth, and are partakers of all the corruption and depravity consequent on the fall of man; and from the evil passions which arise in your own wicked hearts, you form your conceptions of me; and, thinking me like yourselves, conclude, that I can be capable of committing so horrid a crime as self-murder: but you are mistaken in me; my extraction, and my dispositions are very different from yours: I am not of this world; I am no partaker of the evils consequent on sin; I have no propensity to corrupt and evil passions; my mind is not tainted with the corruption of human nature, the source of temptation, and the fountain of all evil: I came from above, and if you believe in me, you will find a remedy for those evils which flow from the bitter fountain of the fall of man, and will be cleansed from that pollution which flows from your earthly origin; but if ye still continue in unbelief, *ye shall die in your sins.*

The Jews, in order to vindicate themselves, inquired what sort of a person he was, or who he pretended to be? To which our Lord replied, *Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning;* meaning *the light of the world*, which he had styled himself in the beginning of this discourse: adding, *I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I spake to the world those things which I have heard of him.* However plain this discourse may appear, it was not understood by the stupid Jews; they did not perceive, *that he spake to them of the Father.* But JESUS told them, that when they had crucified him, they would be convinced by the miracles attending that awful hour his resurrection from the dead, the descent of the Holy Spirit on his disciples, and the destruction of the Jewish nation, both who he was, and who the Father was, that sent him: *When ye have lifted up the Son of man*, said he, *then shall ye know that I am he, And that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.*

As he spake these words, many of the Jews believed him to be the Messiah; perhaps, by his being lifted up, they did not understand his crucifixion, but his being exalted to the throne of David: but JESUS told them, if they persevered in the belief of his word, they should really become his disciples, and being fully instructed in every doctrine of the gospel, they should not only be freed from the slavery of sin, but also from the ceremonial part of the law of Moses: *If ye continue in my word*, said he, *then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

The Jews on hearing him declare, that they should be made free, hastily and warmly replied, *We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man.* This assertion, if taken in a literal sense, was absolutely false, the whole nation being, at that very time, in bondage to

the Romans; nor were their ancesters any strangers to bondage and slavery, having severely felt the tyrannical yoke of the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Babylonish kings. It must therefore be supposed, that the expression was meant in a metaphorical sense, and alluded to spiritual bondage: in this sense, it was a freedom in respect to religion which they asserted, and they meant, that they were the descendants of illustrious ancestors, who, in the worst of times, had preserved sentiments in religion and government worthy the posterity of Abraham; nor had the hottest persecution of the Assyrian kings, been able to compel them to embrace the religion of the Heathens; in respect to truth, they were never in bondage to any man, and they asked our Redeemer, *How sayest thou, ye shall be made free?*

In answer to this question, JESUS replied, that they who gave themselves up to a vicious course of life, and to the gratification of their sensual appetites, were the worst of slaves, and it was highly necessary for them to consider whether this character did not belong to themselves: *Verily, verily, I say unto you*, said he, *whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin.* And, as a slave cannot be assured of the continuance of his master's favour, nor of abiding in his house continually, so our great Redeemer observed, that his Father might justly, for their sins, deprive them of the external privileges which they had so grossly abused: as their sins had rendered them bond-slaves to divine justice, they might expect to fall under the severest marks of his displeasure, except they prevented the dreadful evils, consequent on their wickedness, by believing on his Son, and receiving him, who alone was able to make them free indeed, and place them in the heavenly Jerusalem. Our Lord then proceeded to inform them, that though, in a natural sense, they were the seed of Abraham; yet, in a moral sense, they were the offspring of Satan, which was fully manifested by their unjust, and cruel design to destroy their great deliverer: *I know*, said he, *that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because*

my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which you have seen with your father. To this the Jews hastily and angrily replied, *Abraham is our father:* but our Redeemer informed them, that it appeared from their conduct, that they were of another original: *If,* said he, *ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.*

Our Lord having declared to the Jews that it was manifest from their deeds, and their wicked inclinations whose children they were; they willing to justify themselves, replied with some warmth: *We be not born of fornication: we have one Father, even God.* By these expressions, the Jews did not mean a natural, but a spiritual lineage, and by their not being born of fornication, their being free from idolatry, which, in the language of the prophets, is represented as fornication and adultery: they were not idolaters themselves, nor born of idolatrous parents, and therefore, they styled themselves the children of God. But JESUS gave them to understand, that if they were the children of God, they would manifest their relation by their love to his Son: *If God were your Father,* said he, *ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God: neither came I of myself, but he sent me:* but ye, continued our great Redeemer, are of your father the devil; ye appear in his likeness, and continue to gratify the evil inclinations, and diabolical passions, which ye have learnt of him, and derived from him; falsehood, pride, and cruelty, are the passions which he constantly inspires, and these are abundantly manifested in your temper and conduct; he delights in murder and blood, and you are plotting against the life of the innocent; falsehood and lies are natural to him, and he never speaketh the truth, but to put off some lie which he hath joined to it: *Ye are,* said the exalted Saviour of sinners, *of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a mur-*

derer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth ye believe me not.

Our Lord then publicly challenged all his enemies, to prove him guilty of any falsehood: *Which of you*, said he, *convicteth me of sin?* Are any of you able to shew that I have done any thing which renders me unworthy of belief? Can you prove that I have taught false doctrine? Have I reproved you unjustly for your actions? Have I charged you with crimes you were not guilty of? And can any of you prove me guilty of any sinful action, or prove any part of my conduct to be inconsistent with the character I have assumed? If none of you can do this, but must confess that my doctrine and life are such as might be expected from a messenger sent from God; *Why do you not believe me?* But the reason is plain, you do not belong to God, ye have no interest in his favour, nor are partakers of his grace: *He that is of God, heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.*

This declaration exasperated and enraged the Jews to the highest pitch, and with a mixture of disdain and contempt, they replied, *Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?* His calling the descendants of Abraham the children of the devil, they thought was a sufficient proof, that either he must be a profligate wretch, which they meant by calling him a Samaritan, or else must be instigated by some evil spirit. But JESUS replied, that he was not under the dominion of any evil spirit, but spoke the words of eternal truth; he was not in league with hell, nor in alliance with the prince of darkness: on the contrary, he honoured his Father, by speaking the words of truth, which he sent him to deliver: *I have not a devil*, said he, *but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me, and I seek not mine own glory; there is one that seeketh and judgeth.* Our

great Redeemer, by these words, gave them to understand, that he did not court their applause, or fear their reproaches: for there was one concerned, that was able to vindicate his honor, and severely punish all who should dare to attack him with unjust and malignant reproaches.

Our great Redeemer, having vindicated his character, proceeded to make a declaration, which very much surprised the Jews with whom he was conversing, *Verily, verily, I say unto you*, said he, *if a man keep my words, he shall never see death.* The Jews thinking these words had reference to a natural death, cried out with an air of triumph, *Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets: and thou sayest, if a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? And the prophets are dead; whom makest thou thyself?* John viii. 52, 53. To this our great Redeemer replied, that as they had lately objected to the testimony which he bare of himself, he should not rest the cause on that foundation, but refer it to his Father, whom they acknowledged to be the supreme Lord of heaven and earth: but, though they pretended to worship the true God, they were totally ignorant of him; they neither formed just conceptions of him, nor worshipped him in the manner they ought; they were not the persons by whom he required to be worshipped, and whom he always accepted: on the contrary, JESUS declared, that he formed just ideas of God, and obeyed his precepts; if he was to say he did not know him, he would be a liar, like the Jews with whom he was conversing. And as to the patriarch Abraham, of whom they boasted so much, he earnestly desired to see the day of the Messiah, and had so much of it revealed to him, as filled his heart with gladness: *If I honor myself*, said our great Redeemer, *my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me: of whom ye say, he is your God, yet ye have not known him, But I know*

him: and if I should say, I know him not, I should be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced, or desired, *to see my days; and he saw it, and was glad.*

The Jews understanding these words in a natural sense, concluded that he affirmed, that he was before Abraham, and knowing that he was under fifty years old, they considered this declaration as absolutely impossible, and highly ridiculous. They had no conception of his divine nature, though he had so often told them he was the Son of God, and, of consequence existed with the Father before the commencement of time. This gross stupidity and perverseness, induced our great Redeemer to assert his dignity in the plainest terms; *Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.* This declaration so enraged the Jews that they rushed upon him with the utmost violence and fury; and, as nothing less than his immediate death would satisfy them, they took up stones to stone him: but JESUS, either rendering himself invisible, or filling the minds of his enemies with confusion, and absence of thought, passed immediately and imperceptibly through the crowd, and departed out of the temple.

While JESUS remained in Jerusalem, he saw in one of the streets of the city, a man who had been blind from his birth: the sight of so distressed an object, soon excited the compassion of the kind and benevolent Saviour of sinners; the various affronts and indignities which he had so lately received from the Jews, could not prevent him from the exertion of his omnipotence in favour of such objects as these, though they belonged to that cruel, malicious and unbelieving nation; he was not to be provoked by their crimes, so far as to withhold his blessings from them. Accordingly, he beheld this poor blind man, not with a short and careless view, but with a steady and fixed attention; he cast on him the eyes of his divine com-

passion, and determined to afford him unexpected relief.

The disciples, remarking their Lord's attention to this distressed, helpless person, and, doubtless, imagining that as he had engaged the pity of the only person who was able to help him, he would soon, by divine power and goodness, be restored to sight, asked their Master, what was the cause of his blindness: and they were the more solicitous to be satisfied in this matter, as the disorder had commenced before his birth: they had learned from the law, that sin was the cause of affliction and bodily distemper, and that the Lord visits the iniquities of the fathers upon their children; and therefore, they inquired of their Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? To this question, our Lord replied, that this disorder was not the immediate consequence of the man's own sin, nor that of his parents, but that he was born blind, that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

By this reply, our blessed Saviour has taught us, that a curious inquiry into the cause of those afflictions and distresses of particular persons, which seem very extraordinary, and are peculiarly affecting and unaccountably deplorable, is impertinent and vain; and our censure of such persons as the greatest of sinners, and bringing down remarkable vengeance from heaven on their wickedness, is cruel and unjust; the designs of the great Governor of the universe are not open to our view; he is perfectly and immutably wise; we are full of blindness and folly; he knows how to answer the ends of his own government, and accomplish the designs of his grace, by the afflictions and distresses, which he sometimes permits to fall upon his own people: while the narrowness of our hearts, and our foolish pride and vanity, are prone to ascribe those afflictions to a man's own personal vices, which are for the glory of God, and intended to work out the supe-

or good of the suffering person, or some way or other to promote the real advantage of mankind.

Our blessed Saviour having declared the cause of this man's blindness, namely that the works of God should be made manifest in him, further declared, I must work the work of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work: declaring to his disciples, and all the world, his unwearied labour, and ceaseless attention and care in the work of his Almighty Father; in this he laboured incessantly, both day and night, during the time of his sojourning in the flesh: to this only he directed his thoughts, with unwearied ardour, and unremitting diligence: this he esteemed even as his meat and drink, and suffered the neglect of his ordinary food, that he might finish the great work which he came into the world to accomplish, and bring about the salvation of lost perishing sinners: to accomplish this he left that glory which he had with his Father in the highest heavens, came down into a world of labour and sorrow, and went about doing good.

As it was now the Sabbath day, and our Lord was about to perform an act of mercy and benevolence, which required some little labour, it appears, that the above declaration had some reference to this, and seems to intimate, that, as his time for such acts of mercy, was now so very short, it was not proper to defer it till the day of rest was over.

But before our Saviour proceeded to the miracle of restoring sight to the man who was born blind, he took occasion to speak of himself, as a person appointed to illuminate the minds of men, which lay involved in darkness, more deplorable than that which so many years had beclouded the poor object before him: *As long as I am in the world*, said he, *I am the light of the world.*

Hence it may be observed, that the miracles wrought by our great Redeemer, were not only plain proofs of his mission, and full evidences of his being the Messiah, but had a reference to the spiritual nature of his kingdom, and were emblems of the various parts of his divine character, and victorious deeds. Thus, his miraculously feeding the multitudes with common bread, was a plain indication, that he came into the world to feed the believers in his name with the bread of life, that all-nourishing food for the soul. His restoring sight to the blind, was a lively emblem of the tendency of his doctrine, and efficacy of his power, to dispel the darkness of the soul, and illuminate the blinded understanding of men. His healing their bodies, represented his power to heal the soul, and was an evidence of his authority to forgive sins, as all bodily disorders are the consequences of sin; and a removal of the punishment, strongly implied a power equal to the removal of the guilt. His casting out devils, was an earnest of his final victory over the prince of darkness, and his future triumph over all the powers of hell. His raising particular persons from the dead, was the beginning of his triumph over death, and a demonstration of his ability to accomplish a general resurrection. And finally, his curing all promiscuously, who applied to him, shewed that he was the friend of sinners, and that none who came to him would be rejected, let their sins be ever so numerous, or their case ever so deplorable. Such are the spiritual truths which may be collected from the miracles of the Son of God, and accordingly, we find, that this exalted person himself, at, or soon after the performing his miracles, while the great events were fresh on the memory, often turned his discourse to the spiritual things they represented.

Our blessed Saviour having declared, that he was the light of the world, *spit on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Si-*

loam (which is by interpretation, sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

There is no doubt but our blessed Saviour, could have performed this miracle without any external means; indeed the means he used on this occasion, were so far from being likely to effect the cure, that they seemed calculated to produce a contrary effect. We must therefore conclude, that these means were designed, to direct our attention to higher mysteries, and shew us, that it can be no other power than that which first created man out of clay, that enlightens the dark mind of the dead sinner, and gives spiritual light to those eyes, which are closed by the thick darkness of guilt.

Whether the blind man, whose case we are now considering, was acquainted with the name and character of our Redeemer, the evangelists have not informed us: but as his miracles had been published in Jerusalem so often, as well as in all the country round, it cannot be supposed, that this man, who resided at Jerusalem, could be totally ignorant of them; and it seems, by his ready obedience to the directions of the Son of God, though the means directed, seemed to have no tendency to promote the cure, that he knew who it was that gave him those directions: and we find, that he was amply rewarded for the readiness of his obedience, by receiving the gift of sight.

So wonderful an event, could not fail of engaging the attention, and exciting the surprise of all that beheld it; and those who had often seen the blind man in his dark and deplorable condition, it may be expected, would be very particular in their inquiries into the means of so singular, and surprising an event: it was, doubtless, the subject of general conversation: and one would have thought, it might have been the cause of general conversation; but the obstinacy and perverseness of the Jewish nation, was not to be overcome; their unbelief and hardness of heart, would not give way to the clear-

est evidence. Great was the surprise of the neighbours and friends, of the restored person: They which before had seen him, that he was blind, said, is not this he that sat and begged? Some said, this is he; others said, it is like him; but he said, I am he.

The poor man's heart was full of gratitude and joy, and therefore, perceiving his neighbours to doubt the identity of his person, he proclaimed himself to be the very same whom they had lately seen begging in total darkness; I am he, thus wonderfully blessed with sight by the mighty power of God, said he; I am the man who was blind from my birth, whom ye have all seen, and many of you have relieved me in my deplorable distress; I am he who was even from my mother's womb, involved in pitchy darkness, but now with joy and wonder, which I cannot express, behold the beauteous beams of day.

On hearing so frank and full a declaration, they were anxious to know how this great event was produced; and they hastily inquired, How were thine eyes opened? To which the man replied, a man, that is called JESUS, made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight. They then asked him where the person was who had performed so wonderful, merciful, and beneficial a work? To which the man replied, *I know not:* for JESUS had retired while the man went to wash in the pool of Siloam; perhaps our Lord chose to retire, to avoid the applause of the people, which would naturally follow so stupendous a work, and which, we frequently find in the gospels, he was particularly careful to shun.

The persons who were witnesses of this wonderful event, either out of envy against JESUS, or being desirous to search the affair to the bottom, brought the man who was the subject of this miracle, before the

council, as proper judges of the matter: accordingly, as soon as he was placed before the assembly, the Pharisees began, in a brow-beating way, to question him how he recovered his sight? However awful and terrible such an assembly might be to a poor beggar, the man boldly mentioned the name of JESUS, and positively declared—He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. The Pharisees, having heard this account of the miracle, maliciously declared, that the person who had performed it, was a deceiver; for, if he was a prophet, he would be an observer of the law, which he had openly violated, by working this work on the Sabbath-day. But some in the council, with a spirit of greater candour and moderation, gave it as their opinion, that no deceiver could work so great and beneficial a work; for no wicked man would have either inclination or power to perform it.

The court, being thus divided in their opinion, that regard to the character of JESUS, they asked the man, what he thought of the person who had restored him to sight? To which he boldly and plainly replied, *He is a prophet.* But the Jews still hoped to invalidate the miracle, and therefore insinuated, that it was not true, that this man was really born blind: to come to the bottom of this matter, they sent for his parents, and asked them, whether he was their son, and if he really was born blind, and by what means he had received his sight? To which they answered, that he was most certainly their son, and was born blind; but by what means he had received his sight, or what person had conferred this great blessing upon him, they could not tell: but, as their son was of age to answer for himself, they referred them to him: *These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews; for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man should confess that Jesus was the Christ, he should be put out of the Synagogue.*

In the conduct of the parents of this poor man, we

may behold the great evil of the fear of man, and how powerfully this slavish principle acts on the mind; they well knew by what means their son had received his sight; and, like him, they should, with gratitude and joy, have confessed the divine hand which had wrought this wonderful work; and dared to have acknowledged this extraordinary person before all the world, whatever the consequences of such conduct might have been. Let us hence learn the weakness of human nature, and never presume too much on our own strength, but implore the assistance of the Holy Spirit at all times, and not love the praise of men more than the favour of God.

The Pharisees, finding all their attempts to disapprove or lessen this miracle, did but tend to establish the matter of fact, and make it shine with greater lustre, proceeded to their old method of calumniating the divine author of it: *They called again the man that had been born blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.* To which the man answered, *Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.*

This answer was not sufficient to satisfy the proud and envious opposers of the Son of God, but they sought to confound the poor man, who had thus plainly and boldly affirmed the truth respecting a matter of fact, in which it was impossible he should be mistaken, with a multiplicity of questions, and would meanly lead a poor simple beggar into all the windings of sophistry; and with this view asked him 'What did he to thee? How opened he thine eyes?' These questions they had asked before, and received plain and positive answers to each: but they seemed now to repeat them with a design, that the man, by repeating the manner in which he received the cure, might be sensible that Jesus had, by effecting this miracle, violated the Sabbath, and must, of consequence, be

an impostor. Thus the enemies of our Redeemer would have persuaded the person who had received the invaluable blessing of sight, to join with them in the judgment they formed of the great person who had been his generous benefactor: but their obstinacy and perverseness appeared so plain to him, that he boldly answered, *I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples?*

This answer was received by the council with indignation, scorn, and contempt; for *they reviled him, and said, thou art his disciple, but we are Moses's disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we not whence he is.* The poor beggar was surprised, that so extraordinary a person, and one who possessed such wonderful powers, and exerted them for the good of mankind, should be unknown to the rulers of Israel. *Why herein is a marvellous thing,* said he, *that ye know not whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes: we know that God heareth not sinners; but if a man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began, it was not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.*

Such was the plain and powerful reasoning of this poor man; his inference was just and natural, and founded on a plain matter of fact, and principles which could not be denied: they all knew, nor durst they deny, that *God heareth not sinners:* they all knew that God had heard JESUS; the miracle which he had just now wrought, and which could not be denied, plainly proved this; for it was a miracle which never had been performed by any man since the beginning of the world: it was far above the reach of the powers of nature, or the attainments of human art; and, therefore, its origin must be truly divine. It there-

fore undeniably followed, that JESUS was not a sinner, but sent from God, otherwise he could do nothing.

The Pharisees were not ignorant, that this argument was conclusive; they felt its whole force, and well knew that it could not be resisted; accordingly, they did not attempt to answer it, but had recourse to punishment, and abusive language: *Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us*, said they: thou impudent, illiterate mortal, whose understanding is as dark as thy body lately was, dost thou presume to judge and determine, and dissent in opinion from the wise and learned! Thou, who wast born under the heaviest punishment of sins, dost thou pretend to instruct the rulers of the people, who are eminent for their knowledge of the law! Having thus vented their pride and envy, in reviling the poor man, the evangelist adds, *they cast him out:* that is, they passed on him the sentence of excommunication, which is the highest punishment it was in their power to inflict: but, though he was cut off from the Jewish synagogue and society, he was received into a society, whose privileges are great, and from which he could never be excluded by any unjust sentence, by any body of men, however powerful: he was united to a society whose members are never cut off, but will unite in happiness, love, joy, and glory, during a boundless eternity.

That this poor man was received amongst the number of the disciples of CHRIST, is manifest from the conversation which soon after passed between the restored person and our great Redeemer: *Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe in the Son of God.*

The man did not know how to answer this question till he knew who was the great person which JESUS had mentioned to him; and therefore, he inquired,

Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? Our great Redeemer would not keep him in suspense, but immediately and explicitly replied, *Thou hast both seen him, and it is he who talketh with thee.* The poor man answered, with gratitude and joy, *Lord I believe, and he worshipped him.* Our Lord graciously accepted of his adoration, and glancing at the pride, and perverseness of the Pharisees, he said, *For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not, might see; and that they which see, might be made blind.* Some of the Pharisees, which were with him heard these words, and perceiving the reference to themselves, they asked, are we blind also? To which our Lord replied, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, we see, therefore your sin remaineth.

Our Lord then, to shew the disparity between himself, and those proud, hypocritical teachers, assumed the character of a shepherd, and displayed his love, tenderness, and care for his chosen followers, by the similitude of the care and watchfulness of a good shepherd over his flock, while such false pretenders, and hypocritical teachers as the Pharisees, might fitly be compared to a gang of thieves, whose only view is to disturb and destroy: *The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that the sheep might have life, and they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*

And further to shew the absolute necessity of believing in him, and receiving his doctrine, our great Redeemer compared himself to a door; *Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers. He that entereth not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief, and a robber.*

Though these similitudes contained a very severe reproof, directed to the false teachers of Israel, they did not understand the meaning of them, and the people were much divided in their sentiments concerning him and his teaching; some said, *He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of one that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?*

From the pride, envy, obstinate perverseness, and implacable resentment of the Pharisees, we should learn to contemplate the crafty insinuation, and subtle endeavours of the enemies of the cross of CHRIST in these latter times: nor need we be surprised, if we find the same malicious insinuations in different shapes levelled against ourselves, if we are enabled to embrace the truths of the gospel, and to confess before all men the glory, honour and dignity of him who hath opened our eyes, and brought us *out of darkness into his marvellous light.* It is contrary to the nature of the world, or worldly minded men, to love our Lord JESUS CHRIST, or to esteem those who profess to know him, and bear witness concerning the world, that its works are evil. Let us not, therefore, be discouraged if we find the world to hate us, and load us with unjust reproaches for our attachment to the cause of our great Redeemer; but, like the blind man, whose case we have been considering, let us openly and boldly profess the truth, and declare the power of God, who hath illuminated our dark minds, and led us in the paths of everlasting light and happiness.

The feast of dedication now drew near, and our Lord prepared to go to Jerusalem, to be present at the solemnity. This feast was not appointed by Moses, but by that noble warrior, and heroic reformer, Judas Maccabeus, in commemoration of his having cleansed the temple, and restored its worship, after both had been prophaned and polluted by that abominable tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes.

But, though this feast was of human institution, our Lord chose to be present at, although he knew that fresh attempts would be made against his life; his time on earth he knew was short, his public ministry was drawing to a period, and, therefore, he would not omit any opportunity of preaching to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and doing good to the children of men; nor did he now, as he had formerly done, travel in private, but openly declared his intention of going to Jerusalem.

The road to the capital from Galilee, to which our Lord had retired after the miracle of restoring sight to the blind man, lay through Samaria. The inhabitants of this country entertained the most inveterate hatred against all who worshipped in the temple at Jerusalem: JESUS was no stranger to this disposition of the Samaritans, and therefore he sent messengers before him that they might find reception for him in one of the villages; but the Samaritans being informed, that the intention of his journey was to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, they suffered their old national prejudice to prevail so far, as to induce them to refuse him admittance.

The messengers who had been sent on this business returned, and gave an account of the inhospitable treatment they had received; which so exceedingly offended the disciples, that they prevailed on James and John, to propose to their Master the calling down fire from heaven to destroy them, pleading the example of the prophet Elijah for such precipitate and violent proceedings: *Lord, wilt thou*, said they, *that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did.*

But the blessed JESUS, whose meekness on all occasions was beyond example, rebuked them for entertaining so hasty and unbecoming a resentment: *Ye know not*, said he, *what manner of spirit ye are of:* ye

are ignorant of the sinfulness of the disposition which ye have now expressed, nor do ye consider the difference between the dispensation of the law and the gospel; the severity of the prophet Elijah was a just punishment to a wicked and cruel, as well as idolatrous king, and a people who had consented to his crimes, and had forsaken the worship of the God of their fathers; it was a punishment very proper for the times, and what the nature of the offence required; it was consistent with the character of the prophet, and not unsuitable to the Mosaic dispensation: but the gospel breathed a very different spirit; the design of our Redeemer's coming into the world, not being to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

Behold here, ye despisers of the gospel dispensation! Ye advocates for the purity and dignity of human nature, and despisers of the cross of CHRIST! Behold here an instance of patience under an unprovoked injury, which cannot be matched amongst all the boasted heroes of antiquity; an instance of patience which expressed infinite sweetness of disposition, worthy to be imitated by all the human race, especially by those who call themselves the disciples of CHRIST.

Entertainment and reception being denied by the inhospitable inhabitants of this Samaritan village, our great Redeemer, with his disciples, directed their way towards another; and as they were on the way, he was met by a stranger, and accosted with this language, *Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.* The blessed JESUS, to whom the hearts of all mankind were open, well knowing that it was only the riches and honours of the Messiah's expected temporal kingdom, which excited this person to make the declaration; he thought proper at first to undeceive him: *Foxes have holes*, said he, *and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head;* alluding to the conduct of the inhospitable Samaritans, and foretelling what they must expect to suffer, who es-

poused the cause, and joined the train of our great Redeemer.

Soon after, our blessed Saviour met with one who had formerly been his disciple, and commanded him to disengage himself from worldly concerns, and to join in his train; but this person excused himself, under pretence of filial piety, and a desire to attend on, and administer relief, to his aged parents: *Lord*, said he, *suffer me first to go and bury my father:* but our great Redeemer replied, *Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.* Let those who are immersed in worldly affairs, follow the concerns of the world, but let those who have received the great truths of the gospel, and made a profession of our Redeemer's name, do every thing in their power to spread the glad tidings of salvation over the whole earth.

A third person proposed to follow our Lord, but desired liberty to return to his house, and take his leave of the family: but, though our Lord would not by any means discourage prudent care in the domestic affairs of life, yet he gave this person to understand, that the salvation of the soul was the principal concern, and required our first, and chief regard; and we should by no means, let the concerns of time and sense, have such an influence on our minds, as to make us lose sight of this great object. Great is the danger of coldness and declension in our spiritual affairs; for our Lord himself declared, in answer to this person's objection: 'No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'

As our blessed Saviour's ministry was from this time till its final period, to be confined to Judea, and the countries beyond Jordan, it was necessary that some messengers should be sent to every town and village, to prepare his way; accordingly, he called his seventy disciples, and gave them proper instructions concern-

ing their behaviour, and the doctrines they were to preach. Having laid before them the particular duties of their mission, he sent them into different parts of the country, and ordered them to visit those particular cities, towns, or villages, where he intended himself to follow them, and preach the doctrine of the everlasting gospel to the inhabitants.

The reason which our great Redeemer assigned for sending these seventy disciples on this important message, was the same which he had before advanced for the mission of the twelve: *The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few.* And being never more to preach in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, the cities wherein he usually resided, and where he had so often delivered his heavenly discourses, and displayed his miraculous power, and divine benevolence, in many wondrous works, he was naturally led to reflect on the reception which himself and his doctrines had met with, from those wicked, impenitent cities. He was sensible of the terrible evils which would flow from rejecting the Son of God, and persisting in the obstinacy of unbelief, notwithstanding the mighty works, which they had seen, and all the opportunities which they had for instruction and improvement; and though he was grieved for their obstinacy and perverseness, he pronounced the following sentence against them: *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For, if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented; sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven shall be thrust down to hell.* To this our exalted Redeemer added, as a consideration which ought to administer comfort, and give encouragement to his disciples: *He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.*

This kind and encouraging declaration, was particularly calculated to comfort and support the disciples he was now sending out, under the contempt and ill-usage they would meet with in executing the duties of their mission: they could not be ignorant, that the preaching of CHRIST himself had often been unsuccessful, and that he had been opposed, reviled, and despised; and therefore, they had no reason to conclude, that they should find a welcome reception, and be received, honoured, and esteemed: but it would, at the worst of times, afford them great consolation to reflect, that the eternal God was on their side, and, however they might be despised and rejected by men, they were sure to be received, honoured, and esteemed by their maker.

The seventy disciples, having received their commission, and instructions, and being by their Master invested with power of working miracles, they departed and preached according to the tenor of their commission, in the cities and villages of Judea and Petrea; and after visiting several places, publishing the glad-tidings of salvation, and working many miracles in confirmation of the truth, they returned to their Master with great joy, saying, *Lord, even the devils are subject unto us, through thy name.*

From these expressions, it seems reasonable to conclude, that the disciples, when they set out on this journey, did not know that their power extended so far as to cast out devils, and they were, no doubt, pleasingly surprised, to find that the apostate spirits trembled at their Master's name. To this our great Redeemer replied, *I beheld Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven:* as much as to say, you need not be astonished at the subjection and dismay of the apostate spirits, their prince is fallen, I saw him fall as swift as lightning from heaven: I have triumphed over him, I came down from heaven, and was manifested in the flesh to destroy his works, and he knows I shall finally conquer him and all his legions, and put them down forever.

Our Lord, then, for the further encouragement of his disciples, informed them, that he would enlarge their power, and increase their authority, not only over evil spirits, but over whatever in this world, had power to hurt or annoy them: *Behold*, said he, *I give unto you power to tread on serpents, and scorpions, and over all the powers of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you.* At the same time our Lord was pleased to inform them, that these miraculous powers were the least part of their privilege, and the consequences attending them, not so much to be rejoiced in, as their title to the eternal reward, which he would bestow on all his faithful followers: *Notwithstanding*, said he, *in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, that your names are written in heaven.*

Nor could the blessed JESUS reflect on the wisdom and goodness of the divine dispensations, and the particular care and tenderness, which the supreme Governor of the universe, manifests to the objects of his love, however mean and despised they may be in the eyes of the world, without feeling extraordinary joy; so that his benevolent heart overflowed with streams of gratitude and praise; 'I thank thee' said he, 'O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.'

The disciples being returned from their tour, JESUS left Samaria, and journeying into Judea, he was met on the road by a certain lawyer, who, in the language of the New Testament, is a person whose employment is the expounding, and explaining the law of Moses. This person was desirous to know whether the doctrines which JESUS advanced, were the same as the precepts of the law; and with this view, he asked our Redeemer what he must do to inherit eternal life. Such was the pride of this teacher of Israel, that it seems by

the sequel, that he asked this important question, to tempt, and not to be instructed: but, though our Lord well knew the secrets of his heart, he did not answer him with such a rebuke as he deserved, but in such a manner as to turn his base design, and sophistical evasions against himself: *What*, said he, *is written in the law? how readest thou?* The Scribe answered, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.*

This reply our Lord received with approbation, and said to the lawyer, *Thou hast answered right; this do and thou shalt live;* if thou art able to fulfil these great precepts of the law, thou mayest claim an interest in the divine favour, on the footing of the eternal rules of righteousness; and as a right to that happiness which is assigned to the keepers of the law: for on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The lawyer now perceived himself taken in his own snare: his conscience could not acquit him of violating these great duties; he was at a loss and confounded, and knew not what to reply; but, yet being willing to say something to justify himself, he inquired, and who is my neighbour? A question very natural to be asked by a bigotted Jew, whose narrow, selfish conceptions led him to despise all who were not the children of Abraham.

To correct the low littleness of such a private party spirit, to open and enlarge the heart to a more generous and noble way of thinking, to shew them the only foundation of true love, and the extensive relation which they and all mankind stood in to each other, our Lord delivered the following most beautiful and instructive parable:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell amongst thieves, which stripped him of

his raiment, and wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at that place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

By this well-chosen, and most elegant and affecting parable, our exalted Saviour beautifully inculcated an open and generous disposition, and greatness of mind, which lays aside all selfish views, and diligently exerts itself in the great work of doing good to mankind, readily relieving all objects of distress, let their national quarrels and religious disputes be what they will. No persons were more hated by the Samaritans than the Jews; for which reason, our Lord represents a Samaritan relieving and succouring a distressed Jew, when a Priest and Levite, of his own nation and religion, had forsaken him. And this affecting parable our Lord laid down as an answer to the question proposed by the lawyer, *Who is my neighbour?* and then put it to his own feelings to determine the matter: *Which now of these three, thinkest thou*, said he, *was neighbour unto him that fell amongst the thieves?* The case was so plain, that the lawyer could but reply, *He that shewed mercy on him.* To which our Redeemer immediately returned, with a look which gave the lawyer to understand that he knew he was silenced, *Go and do thou likewise.*

CHAPTER XXII.

JESUS journeying to Jerusalem to be present at the Feast of Dedication, lodges at Bethany, and is entertained by Martha and Mary: when he arrives at Jerusalem, he attendeth at the Feast, and disputes with the Jews in Solomon's porch: The Feast being over, he retires beyond Jordan, and teacheth his disciples to pray: He casteth out a devil: He dines and disputes with the Pharisees, whom he reprehendeth for their outward Shew of Holiness, and pronounceth woes against them and the Scribes and Lawyers. CHRIST teacheth his Disciples to avoid Hypocrisy, and not to be fearful in publishing his Doctrine: He refuseth to be a Judge in a civil cause, and warneth the people to beware of Covetousness by the parable of a rich Man, who boasted himself in his multiplied Stores: He exhorteth his Disciples to lay up Treasure in Heaven by giving alms; and to be always ready against their Lord's coming.

AFTER our blessed Lord had effectually silenced the cavilling lawyer, he continued his journey towards Jerusalem, to be present at the feast of dedication. In the evening he retired to Bethany, a small village about two miles from Jerusalem. In this village dwelt Martha and Mary, two pious sisters, who dwelt together in the same house with their brother Lazarus. In this little family, our great Redeemer took up his abode, and was joyfully received by the religious young man and his virtuous sisters. Whether any former acquaintance had subsisted between this family and our great Redeemer, the evangelists have not informed us; but it seems they were not unacquainted with his character, for he was kindly received and generously entertained. JESUS, as his custom was, wherever he went, took the opportunity of dispensing his divine instructions, and teaching his

hospitable friends those things which concerned their everlasting peace. Martha was desirous of expressing her regard to her noble guest, by providing a grand entertainment; but Mary, being of a contemplative disposition, was taken with his divine discourses, and sitting at the feet of our great Redeemer, listened to his words with the most earnest and steady attention: Martha, being greatly fatigued with the burthen of the service, was offended at her sister, because she did not help her, and complained to our Lord of her omission: *Lord*, said she, *dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.*

But JESUS, by his answer to this discontented sister, gave her to understand, that it was more pleasing to him, when persons attended on his instructions, and listened to his words, than all their endeavours to provide sumptuous entertainments for himself and his disciples: he was not insensible of any regard which persons had for him, nor unthankful for their kindness, in what way soever it was expressed; but as the good of mankind was his constant endeavour and care, he always approved those expressions of kindness best, which were most conducive to that end: nor could he esteem himself being fed with the food which perisheth, of equal consequence with his bestowing on others, that which endureth to everlasting life: *Martha, Martha*, said he, *thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken from her.*

From this little village JESUS departed to Jerusalem and attended at the feast of dedication. Being in the temple, and standing in Solomon's porch, he was accosted by the Jews, who desired him to tell them plainly, whether he were the Messiah or not? Well knowing, that they did not ask this question for information, but to gain an opportunity of accusing him

to the Romans as a seditious person, who pretended to be the great son of David, promised by the prophets, and by this means, designing to stir up the people to rebellion, and seize on the kingdom; our great Redeemer told them, that they must form a judgment of him from his actions: *I told you*, said he, *and ye believed not: the works I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.* It is in vain to dispute, or lay down reasons, and arguments to persons of your temper and spirit; you are under the dominion of your headstrong passions and wicked hearts, and your inveterate prejudices will not be overcome: you are not of the number of those whom my Father, by his powerful grace, will bring unto me, and cause to believe in my name; these happy persons are assisted by power from on high, they carefully and candidly examine the proofs I have given of my mission, and they believe in me, and receive me, with all their hearts: nor will these my followers and friends lose their rewards; for I will willingly receive them, and make them partakers of eternal life and glory: these persons I will support and defend; I look upon them as my own, and however industrious or assiduous the wicked of this world, or the powers of darkness, may be to deceive and destroy them, they shall never effect their purpose; for I stand determined to bring them safe to my heavenly kingdom, and all their enemies may rage in vain: my Father hath given them to me: all power, both in heaven and earth, is in his hand, and his omnipotence is engaged in their defence: none is able to contend with him, to prevent the accomplishment of his will, or hurt the persons whom he defends: none is able to contend with me, or wrest my people from me; for I and the great eternal Father of the universe are one: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. A stranger they will not follow: for they know not the voice of strangers. And I give unto them eternal life; they shall never perish, neither shall*

any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.

These words highly provoked the Jews; they considered them as blasphemous, and were so enraged, that they took up stones, to stone the exalted Saviour of sinners; they thought they acted in conformity to the law, which commands that all blasphemers shall be stoned; but JESUS asked them, which of the benevolent miracles he had wrought amongst them, deserved such treatment: *Many good works*, said he, *have I shewed you from my Father: for which of these works do ye stone me?* As if he had said, I have fed the hungry in the desert, I have restored strength to the lame, I have cleansed the lepers, I have healed the sick, I have cast out devils, I have raised the dead; for which of these works are you going to stone me? Do such miracles as these admit of the supposition, that the author of them is an imposter? Can you be so stupid as to imagine, that the all-powerful and all-wise Governor of the world would permit any person to perform such works: with no other intention than to deceive mankind, and to propagate falsehood and error? The Jews replied, we do not suppose, that thou deservest punishment for any good work which thou hast performed; punishment which we are preparing, is designed to chastise thee for thy blasphemous speeches; for thou though, a weak mortal like ourselves, arrogantly assumest the power and majesty of the Most High, and, by claiming the incommunicable attributes of deity, makest thyself God: *For a good work*, said they, *we stone thee not; but for blasphemy, and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.* JESUS replied, Has not the Scripture expressly called those *gods*, and the *sons of God*, who were commissioned to govern God's people, and who by the communication of his Holy Spirit, were qualified for the important office

with which they were invested; can you, therefore, impute to that person whom the Almighty hath sanctified, and sent into the world, on the most important business that ever any person was sent into the world to execute, no less than the salvation of lost sinners; can you, I say, impute blasphemy to this person, for taking on himself the title of the Son of God? If my own declaration be not sufficient to induce you to believe, consider the works which I have performed, and let them speak for me: is it not abundantly evident, that they must be the works of the Most High, as only omnipotence could perform them? Is it not then fully manifest, that I and the eternal God are so united, that whatever I say or do, is approved by him? *Is it not written in your law*, said our great Redeemer, *I said, Ye are gods. If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not: but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know, and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him.*

This argument, however plain and conclusive, was far from satisfying the Jews; their wicked hearts were hardened against the truth, and their deep rooted prejudices were not to be overcome: so that what might have convinced an honest, impartial inquirer after truth, had no tendency but to enrage them the more; and our Lord well knowing that it would be to no purpose to reason with so obstinate and envious a race, either by rendering himself invisible, or casting confusion on their minds, departed imperceptibly from amongst them, and so escaped their evil designs.

The feast of dedication being over, our Redeemer departed from Jerusalem, and retired into the country beyond Jordan, where he was received in a far different manner than he had been at Jerusalem. The people in these parts had attended on the preaching

of John the Baptist, and no doubt remembered the character he gave of the Messiah, who was shortly to appear; and finding the predictions of the Baptist fully answered, and fulfilled in JESUS, great numbers were excited to believe.

How long our exalted Saviour, with his train, continued in this country, cannot be clearly determined; but we have no account of his leaving these parts till he was sent for to Bethany, to raise Lazarus from the dead: perhaps, the inhabitants of this country enjoyed the unspeakable blessing of the presence of the Son of God for a considerable time; and we are informed by the evangelists, that while he continued in this country, he prayed with such fervency, that one of his disciples, who was exceedingly affected both with the matter and manner of his address, begged he would teach them to pray. It is probable this disciple was not with JESUS in the beginning of his ministry, when he gave his directions to his disciples concerning their devotions: our Lord, however, gave them the same form of words as he had done before, and gave them some directions respecting their conduct, and exhorted them to constancy and fervency in their prayers: *And I say unto you*, said he, *ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

And, for their encouragement in the great duty of prayer, he referred to their own feelings with respect to their children, and called upon them to judge by these, of the readiness of their heavenly Father, to hear and grant their petitions: 'If, said he, a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall

your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

After these things, our great Redeemer was applied to by the friends of one who was possessed with a devil; he graciously condescended to grant the request and cast out the evil spirit, restoring the disordered person to perfect tranquility of mind: but some of the envious and unbelieving Jews were present, and, as the Pharisees had formerly done, ascribed this stupendous work to the power of the devil. The evangelist informs us, that he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb; and it came to pass, when the devil was gone out the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, 'He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils.'

However weak and frivolous this argument may seem, and however inconsistent and absurd it may appear to impartial judges, it had considerable influence and effect on the ignorant and illiterate, especially on such whose prejudices and interests it favoured. The Pharisees were exasperated at our great Redeemer's conduct, in exposing and condemning their foolish traditions, and they indulged a fixed and habitual hatred against him: these traditions were considered, by the learned men and teacher's of the age, as the very essentials of religion; and by his opposing these, and exposing them to ridicule and contempt, they concluded, that he must be a very wicked person. They had inspired the common people with the highest veneration and reverence for these external ceremonious performances, and, therefore, it is no wonder that they were ready to join them in their resentment, and oppose and persecute a person who had spoken lightly of things which they esteemed so sacred: the great men and leaders of the Jews, had also a notion, that a false prophet had the power of working signs and wonders, and received this power from, and exerted it by, the assistance of wicked spirits: and, therefore, they were

very ready to believe that our Saviour was in league with hell, and performed his miracles by the assistance of the prince of darkness, with design to seduce the people with lying wonders, and turn them from the worship of the true God.

And what induced them the more readily to embrace this opinion, was the testimony of the devils themselves, who, when they were cast out, very frequently and without hesitation, confessed that JESUS was the Son of God; which the Pharisees supposed they would not have done, except it was to carry on the deception: the blinded rulers of Israel, not perceiving that the devils were forced to confess the Messiah, and to submit to superior power. How absurd and ridiculous soever this argument appears to the judicious and impartial, yet as it coincided with the prejudice of the Jews, it had great influence on their minds, and tended to fix them in final unbelief: and however we may be surprised that such weak reasons should have any effect, considering what multitudes were witnesses to the many miracles which the blessed JESUS performed, and considering the nature of those miracles was such, as it is not easy to suppose the Devil would have any hand in performing: yet experience hath abundantly convinced us, that such kind of arguments, joined with their own prejudices, and superstitious opinions, had a great influence in fixing that obstinate people in their infidelity.

But though some amongst the multitude of spectators, were content to ascribe this miracle to the power of the Devil, others were not willing so hastily and inconsiderately to form so base a conclusion, but desired to suspend their opinion till other proofs might be produced, or our Redeemer might have an opportunity to establish his character by a different kind of evidence; and therefore, they desired him to prove himself the Messiah, by giving them a sign from heaven. But JESUS knowing their thoughts, and being

privy to the rancour, and wickedness of their hearts, refused to grant their request: but told them that they were a wicked race of mortals, and discovered a very obstinate and perverse disposition, by seeking a sign from heaven, after such a number of miracles had been performed, as were sufficient to convince any impartial and unprejudiced mind. He therefore informed them that no sign should be given them, but that of the prophet Jonas, *This*, said he, *is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.*

When Jesus had ended his discourse, one of the Pharisees present invited him to dine with him; our Lord accepted the invitation, though probably it was not love and good-will which excited the Pharisee to make it; he accompanied the inviter to his house, and sat down at the table without performing the ceremony of washing, so carefully observed by the other guests: an omission of this kind could not fail of surprising the Pharisee, as Jesus thereby shewed an open contempt of their traditions. Our Lord, who well knew the thoughts of this bigoted, self-conceited Pharisee, said unto him, you Pharisees are remarkably careful to keep every thing clean which touches your food, lest by eating it, your bodies should be polluted; but you take no care to cleanse your minds from the pollution of wickedness. You cannot be ignorant that he who created the body, also formed and inspired the soul; and can you imagine that the Almighty, who approves of purity of body, because it is the work of his hands, and because it conduces to the health thereof, will not also insist on a greater purity of the soul, which is doubtless the far noblest part possessed by man. Instead therefore, of that scrupulous care and exactness in washing your hands when you sit down to meat, ye should be careful to cleanse your hearts from all pollution, and fervently pray to the God of Israel to purify your minds; this will render it impossible for any external thing to defile you,

and will at all times be looked upon with complacency and delight by the God of purity. *Now*, said he; *do you Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup or platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without, made that which is within also? but rather give alms of such things as ye have; and behold, all things are clean unto you.*

Such was the language of the Son of God, but the proud self-conceited Pharisees would not hear; however clear and convincing, however mild and persuasive, the reasonings of our great Redeemer were, the inveterate prejudices and rooted unbelief of these men, prevented these excellent discourses from having their proper effect. Our blessed Saviour therefore treated them with more severity, and denounced against them the most heavy woes for their hypocrisy, which was manifest in their scrupulous exactness in the performance of the minutest part of the ceremonial observances, contained in their traditions, while they were most scandalously careless and negligent in the weightier matters of the law: *Woe unto you, Pharisees! said he, for ye tithe mint and rue, and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment, and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uttermost seats in the synagogues, and greeting in the markets. Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.*

Though this discourse was principally assigned to affect the Scribes and Pharisees, a certain lawyer, who sat at the table, thinking that this rebuke affected persons of his profession, was very much offended; but our great Redeemer, who regarded not the persons nor professions of men, plainly told him what was his real character: *Woe unto you also, ye lawyers,* said he, *for*

ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.

The blessed JESUS also blamed the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees, for building the sepulchres of the prophets, whom their fathers had murdered; because they did not erect these edifices so much out of respect to the memory of the deceased worthies, as to exhibit the utmost ostentation of piety, and make themselves admired for their noble sentiments; while, by their constant line of conduct, they gave reason to conclude, that they secretly entertained the same hatred to reproof, and unconquerable obstinacy and perverseness, which excited their fathers to the most unreasonable and cruel of their actions: 'Woe unto you,' said he, 'for ye build the sepulchre of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily, I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.' As our Redeemer well knew that this hardened and unbelieving generation, would spill the blood of the Son of God, and of consequence be guilty of the blackest, and most impious and horrid martyrdom, which could be committed: he might justly represent them, as the most black, horrid, and hateful race of murderers, as guilty in themselves, as much to be abhorred, and equally deserving peculiar and distinguished vengeance, as if they had shed all the innocent blood which ever had been spilt in the world.

Our great Redeemer, after pronouncing these woes,

turned his discourse against the lawyers, and condemned them for filling the minds of the people with wrong notions, arising from forced interpretations of the scriptures; by which means the minds of the people were prejudiced against the gospel, and prevented from receiving the truth: *Woe unto you lawyers!* said he, *for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye enter not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.*

However just and reasonable these discourses were, the severity, of the rebukes contained in them, was highly provoking to those Scribes and Pharisees; they were conscious of being guilty of the crimes laid to their charge, but their pride could not bear the thoughts of being sunk in the opinion of the people, who heard these remarks; their minds were agitated with conflicting passions, but pride and envy urged them to the most base and despicable actions; their rising resentment studied revenge, and they were so mean as to urge our exalted Redeemer to discourse on various subjects, with no other view than to ensnare him, and by that means render him obnoxious, either to the Roman government, or to the common people amongst the Jews, the evangelist informs us, that, as he said these things unto them, the Scribes and Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things, laying in wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.

Our great Redeemer baffled all their attempts, and leaving the house of the Pharisee, he went amongst the multitude, which was waiting at the door; so great were the numbers, and so hard did they press to get near the exalted person of our Saviour, that they trod one upon another. The first discourse he held with the multitude, after he had left the Pharisee's house, was to warn them against the pernicious poison of the Pharisee's example, who appeared in disguise, and pre-

tended to be the most strict in the observance of the law, the most simple in their manners, and pure and spotless in their conversation, when, at the same time, they were privately guilty of the most gross and scandalous vices; our Lord, therefore, exhorted the multitude to be very careful not to do any thing which would not bear the light, but let the whole of their behaviour be honest, open, and upright; for the time would come, when all secrets would be revealed, and all the works of darkness brought to light: 'Beware ye,' said he, 'of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, which shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore, whatever ye have spoken in darknesss, shall be heard in the light, and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the house tops.'

Our Redeemer proceeded to observe, that an open, honest course of conduct, above hypocrisy, and disdaining all disguise, would enable them to put their trust in their Maker; while the contrary conduct tended to fill the mind with that fear of man, which is so projudicial to the welfare of the soul: he therefore exhorted them, not to fear the malice or power of any of the sons of men; these can extend no further than the death of the body, but cannot touch the immortal soul, which may bid defiance to the impotent rage of the gloomy tyrant, and never tremble at the fury of the oppressor: such weak and feeble creatures as men, are not to be feared, but the wrath of the eternal God ought rather to be dreaded; he is able, after he hath destroyed the body, to confine the soul in eternal torments. How happy are the persons who are under his holy protection: all things are in his power, nothing can escape his notice, nor any thing happen without his permission: *And I say unto you, my friends*, said our great Redeemer, *be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that, have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear him, which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell;*

yea, I say unto you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows.

The blessed JESUS thought fit to add, that the fear of man would be a snare to great numbers, and prevent them from confessing the truth; but whoever were overcome by this prevailing principle, and were ashamed to acknowledge our Saviour, would be finally rejected at the awful day, when he would sit in judgment, and own and reward all his faithful followers: and whoever were induced to speak evil of the Spirit of God, the grand agent in carrying on the Messiah's kingdom in the hearts of men, our Redeemer informed them, should be punished with peculiar and distinguished vengeance, by a justly provoked, sin avenging God: *Also I say unto you,* said he, *whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven.*

Having shewn the necessity of boldly confessing him before men, he proceeded to encourage his disciples with the promise of immediate assistance, when they were brought before princes, and the great men of the earth; which divine assistance would deliver them from all embarrassment, respecting what they should answer, when they were examined concerning their faith: *And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how, or what ye shall answer, or what ye shall say; for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour, what ye ought to say.*

While the blessed JESUS was delivering these exhortations to his disciples, a person amongst the sur-

rounding multitude, begged that he would interpose his authority with his brother, in order to oblige him to divide the paternal inheritance with him; but, as this decision properly belonged to the magistrate, our blessed Saviour, who did not come into the world to settle worldly affairs, but to attend to those things which concerned the immortal soul, declined the task, with this reply, *Man, Who made me a judge, or a divider over you?* He took occasion, however, from hence, in the most solemn manner, to caution his hearers against covetousness: for he observed that neither the length nor the happiness of life depended on the largeness of possessions: 'Take heed,' said he, 'and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.'

And to enforce this important exhortation, he placed before them, in the strongest, and most alarming point of light, an example of the most bewitching influence of wealth in the parable of the rich glutton, who was suddenly cut off in the midst of his projects, and became a dreadful example of the folly of amassing the riches of this world, and depending on the goods of this life, without any regard to the government of God, or the interests of the immortal soul. This wretched man, forgetting his mortality, made preparations for a long and luxurious life, pleasing himself with the thoughts of a long succession of sensual enjoyments: but, alas! whilst he was providing repositories for his vast riches, he was arrested by the king of terrors, and hurried, without time for consideration, into the eternal world. The parable which our great Redeemer put forth on this occasion, is contained in these words: 'The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, this will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits, and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many

years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?'

What an awful summons was this! How unexpected, how alarming, how dreadful! The man lying on his bed, full of anxiety, care, and solicitude, not to acquire wealth, but how to make room to lodge it, and how to enjoy it, doubtless thought, that riches gave him a title to every gratification and enjoyment which the world can afford, or the sense and appetite of man partake of: his restless thought ranges through the wide fields of dissipation and pleasure, and such numerous scenes of imaginary delight press on his ravished senses, he knows not where to fix. In the midst of this pleasing perplexity, a strange messenger strikes at his breast. Who is it that thus alarms him? It is the great king of terrors, he comes commissioned to destroy, the case admits of no refusal or delay. Is there no refuge! is there no deliverer! Call the physicians: they instantly attend, but with looks solemn and sad. What! is there no hope? So often as you have partook of my bounty, and such obligations as you are under to me. They all, with grief, declare the case beyond their art.—Then say, how long I have to live.—The compass of the night concludes your earthly race.—How short the warning, and with what hasty steps the dread destroyer advances to stop my breath! But is there no way to appease him, and engage him to hold his hand? Will he not be persuaded? He makes no agreement nor league with any. Will not pity excite him, or petitions move him? He knows no pity, and he hears no prayers. Will not my riches bribe him? Riches are unavailable in the hour of death; nor will mountains of gold delay the awful stroke one moment. But how many wretched creatures are there, who would be glad of his friendly aid to destroy a loathed existence? Why then should he attack one who had such vast prospects of pleasure and delight before him, and gloried in the expectation

of many happy years to come? He acts according to his commission from above, and the awful stroke no mortal can escape or evade a moment. Then all is over! let me think who shall be my heir. But reason failed; and, before that important point could be settled, the poor deluded mortal expired. And now, instead of a long succession of sensual delights, an awful eternity presents itself to view, and the poor soul is terrified and plunged into the depths of despair and horror, at the prospect of judgment to come. A dark night of horror in an instant overwhelms that soul, which had promised itself so much ease and pleasure; and, instead of eating, drinking, and making merry; instead of gay scenes of dissipation, and a variety of sensual delights, eternal tortures, unspeakable thirst, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, must be the portion of this miserable being to all eternity.

So is he, added our great Redeemer, *that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.* Thus shall he be taken away from all that his soul desireth; thus shall he be torn from all his temporal prospects and pleasures; none of his beloved enjoyments shall follow him; naked as he came shall he depart out of the world; nor could all his riches, could he take them with him, be able to procure him the least comfort or respite in this world of horrors. How should this reflection awaken us from our pleasing dreams of comfort and happiness, in this world of misery, this vale of tears; how should it convince us of the uncertainty of all sublunary good, and the utter impossibility of the things of this world to satisfy the soul, or make us truly happy: how should it alarm us, when planning fancied schemes of worldly pleasure or advantage, without the least consideration of the great Disposer of all events: how should it reconcile us to the disposal of infinite Wisdom, when our portion of temporal things is small and scanty; and we are surrounded with difficulties and troubles, without the assistance of the great King of the universe, all our promises of security are vain and foolish; he can render

all our labours abortive; and the richest and most opulent person, when they think themselves secure, and are planning schemes of pleasure and gratification, may, in a moment, be stripped of all their possessions, and torn from all their comforts; when the soul, naked and defenceless, and clothed in all its guilt, will enter into an awful eternity, and be brought, trembling and astonished, to the throne of its offended Maker.

Our blessed Saviour, having delivered this awakening parable, proceeded to apply it to his disciples; and from hence took occasion to warn them of an over solicitous care, concern, and desire after the things of this world. He rather advised them to trust in God, whose fatherly care extends itself over all his creatures: the fowls of heaven are fed by his bounty, and the lilies are clothed in brighter hues, and more glorious raiment than the greatest monarch. If, therefore, argued the blessed JESUS, the great Governor of all things so carefully provides for the inferior part of his creation; if he feeds the ravens and clothes the lillies; surely the children of men have the highest reason to depend on his all-preserving, and all-supporting goodness; especially those who have the well-grounded hopes, that the great Eternal Maker and supporter of all things, has appointed them to happiness in a future state, have little reason to doubt that he will not provide them all that is necessary for their comfort and support in this: *Fear not*, said he, *little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*. At the same time, he gave his disciples another precept, particularly calculated for those times in which the profession of the gospel exposed men to the loss of their substance: sell that ye have, said he, and give alms; provide yourselves bags; which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens, that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Having thus exhorted them to the disengagement of

their affections from the things of this world, he advised them to be at all times ready for the discharge of their duty: *Let*, said he, *your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.*

This was spoken in allusion to the customs of the eastern countries, where anciently great entertainments were made in the evening; and on these occasions, servants demonstrated their diligence, by watching, and keeping their loins girded that they might be ready to open the door on the first knock of their master: nor was it uncommon for the master, in order to reward such a servant, to order him a repast, and sometimes even to give it him with his own hand. In allusion to which custom, our blessed Saviour added, 'Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily, I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

whenever they heard of unexpected and dreadful evils falling on the sons of men; and instanced the case of the eighteen persons on whom the tower of Siloam fell, and crushed them to pieces: *Or*, said he, *those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except you repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

Our Lord also endeavoured to rouse them to the consideration of their state, by the parable of the fig-tree, which the master of the vineyard, after finding it three years barren, ordered to be destroyed, but at the earnest request of the dresser of the vineyard, it was spared one year longer: *A certain man*, said he, *had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering, said unto him, lord, let it alone this year also, till I dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

By this parable, our Lord represented the goodness, and forbearance of his Almighty Father, manifested towards the Jewish nation, where his Son had now been about three years, preaching the kingdom of God; and though they might be justly destroyed for their obstinacy and perverseness, yet the awful stroke was delayed, and space was given them for repentance; but he gave them a strong intimation, in this parable, that if they persisted, they must expect that vengeance will not always sleep, but after all the divine forbearance had been abused, would awake to their sudden and dreadful destruction.

When our Lord was teaching in one of the synagogues in Perea, on the Sabbath day, he observed a woman, who, for the space of eighteen years, had not been

able to stand upright; a person labouring under so dreadful a disorder could not fail of exciting the compassion of the benevolent Saviour of sinners, he beheld this affecting object with pity, and he removed her complaint; she who came to the synagogue bowed down to the ground with an infirmity, returned to her house upright, being, by the all-powerful Son of God, restored to perfect health.

This benevolent action, which surely deserved the thanks of the whole congregation, so highly offended the master of the synagogue, that he openly testified his displeasure, and reproved the people, and represented them as Sabbath-breakers, because they came that day to be healed: *There are six days*, said this surly, self-conceited ruler to the people, *in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath-day.*

But our Lord soon silenced this self-conceited Pharisee, by observing that he had not deviated from their own avowed practice: they made no scruple of loosing their cattle, and leading them to the water on the Sabbath-day, because the mercy of the action sufficiently justified them for performing it; and surely his action of loosing, by a single word, a woman, a rational creature, a daughter of Abraham, who had been bound by an incurable distemper, the tedious space of eighteen years, was abundantly justified; nor could this bigoted ruler have thought otherwise, had not his reason been blinded by his superstition. Such was the sentiment of the Son of God, who answered him with this severe rebuke, 'Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath, loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all

the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

From this instance we may remark the evil effects of superstition and a bigoted attachment to customs and ceremonies, which have no foundation in reason nor the revealed will of God; these pernicious principles oppose the use of the faculties, root compassion out of the heart, and destroy the feelings of humanity.

Our Lord having silenced the proud ruler of the synagogue, and received the acclamations and applauses of the people, reflected with pleasure on the truth, reason, and divine power from above, which support his kingdom; and, on this occasion, he repeated the parables of the grain of mustard-seed, and the leaven, to shew the future success of the gospel, and the power and influence of his religion on the hearts and lives of men, and its rapid progress through the world, notwithstanding the opposition of the great men of the earth, and the fury of the unthinking multitude.

Our Lord having thus sown the seeds of the gospel in the country of Perea, crossed Jordan, and proceeded by slow and short stages towards Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in every village, and publishing the glad-tidings of salvation to the inhabitants of the countries he passed through.

While he was thus prosecuting the great work of instructing mankind, one of the persons who accompanied him, inquired, 'Lord, are there few that be saved.' Probably the person who proposed this question, had heard our Lord describe the success of the gospel, by the parables of the mustard-seed, and the leaven; and had no further views of the kingdom of the Messiah, than the setting up a temporal dominion. These notions were entertained by the Jews in general, and induced them to conclude, that CHRIST hereby meant no more than a temporal salvation. JESUS, to convince

this curious inquirer, and the rest of the Jews, that he had no intention to erect a secular kingdom, answered his question in a spiritual manner, by which he gave the Jews to understand, that very few of them would be partakers of the honour and happiness of his kingdom; and he exhorted them to use their utmost efforts to know the truth, and become members of the church, and heirs of glory, by improving the means which were afforded them; for the time would soon come, he assured them, when the means which they now enjoyed would be taken away, and they would perceive their state to be finally and irrevocably determined, and then however earnestly they might desire such opportunities as they now enjoyed, they should not be able to attain them: *Strive*, said he, *to enter in at the straight gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house, has risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us, and he shall answer, and say unto you, I know you not whence you are.* This sentence our Lord informed them would be final, and not to be altered by their most earnest petitions and expostulations: *Then*, added our great Redeemer, *shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the East, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.*

Soon after our blessed Saviour had delivered these sentiments, some of the Pharisees thinking to intimidate him, and cause him to depart out of the country,

came to him and pretended that Herod had a design against his life. It is not likely that Herod, who had suffered so much remorse on account of his having put John the Baptist to death, should so soon attempt the life of one whose works declared him to be a greater prophet; perhaps, that prince might wish JESUS to depart out of his territories, though he durst not use force against him: nor is it unlikely that the Pharisees were desirous of his departure out of the country, because his discourses tended to expose their hypocrisy, and lessen them in the opinion of the people. The answer which our great Redeemer made to this message, is contained in the following words: 'Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day, and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless, I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be, that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.'

Having returned this answer to the Pharisees, and considering the treatment which the prophets had met with from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and well knowing the wickedness of that unbelieving city, and their designs against his life, he pathetically lamented their obstinacy and perverseness, and the terrible desolation which would soon overtake them for their sins; *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, said he, *which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate; and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come, when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

One of the chief of the Pharisees, soon after our Lord had made this pathetic exclamation, invited him to his house, to take a repast: JESUS well knew, that this invitation did not proceed from hearty good-will: but, as he never shunned an opportunity of doing

good, even to his most implacable enemies, he thought fit to accept it. It was the Sabbath-day, and when he had entered the Pharisee's house, a man was brought before him who was diseased with a dropsy.

The Pharisees well knew the benevolent disposition of our great Redeemer, and they thought so miserable an object would not fail of exciting his compassion, and cause him to work a miracle on that day, which would give them the opportunity of accusing him as a prophaner of the Sabbath. Jesus, who knew the secret thoughts of their hearts, asked the Pharisees, and lawyers, whether it was *lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day?* But they refusing to give any answer to the question, our Lord laid his hand on the diseased person, and immediately his body was reduced to its former dimensions, and his health and strength returned. So kind, so salutary and benevolent, as well as wonderful an action, ought to have convinced the Pharisees, that the person who wrought it, must be endowed with power from on high, as no less than the mighty power of God could produce such events; or if they could suppose that wicked agents had the power, that is not the way in which they might be expected to exert it; but these hypocritical wretches, instead of being persuaded that Jesus was sent from God, and exerted his miraculous powers for the good of mankind, were labouring to turn this miracle to his disadvantage. But our Lord soon put an end to their wicked designs, by proving, that according to their own allowed practice, he had done nothing but what was lawful: *Which of you,* said he, *shall have an ass, or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath-day?* Our Lord's argument stood thus, If a misfortune happens to one of your beasts, you make no scruple of assisting it on the Sabbath, though the action be attended with considerable labour: and surely, I may relieve a descendant of Abraham, when nothing more is required, than touching him with my hand. This reasoning was so strong, forcible, and

conclusive, and, at the same time, so simple and easy, that the most illiterate of mankind, must see its propriety, and feel its force, and the most prejudiced could not contradict it. This was manifest from the profound silence with which these remarks of our Lord were heard, and which continued after he had done speaking. None of his adversaries, however inveterate their malice, or hot their resentment, durst at this time appear against him, for they could not answer again to these things.

Before they sat down to meat, our blessed Saviour had an opportunity of remarking the pride of the Pharisees, which manifested itself by an anxious and eager desire to obtain the most honourable place at the table; nor did he fail, on this occasion, to give them such a rebuke, as their ridiculous behaviour deserved. To make them sensible of their folly, our Lord called upon them to consider, that pride generally exposes the person to frequent mortifications, and many affronts, while an humble deportment is a sure way to honour and respect: 'When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding,' said he, 'sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden, of him; and he that bade thee and him, come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.'

Having directed this discourse to the Pharisees in general, our Lord turned to the master of the house, and said unto him, 'When thou makest a dinner, or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and

the blind:' limit not thy hospitality to the rich and great, but let the poor and needy be partakers of thy bounty: and thou shalt be blessed, added our Lord, for they cannot recompense thee; but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

While our Lord was thus discoursing, one of the Pharisees, seeming to be ravished with the delightful prospect of the happiness which good men will enjoy in the heavenly world, cried out, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.' Our Lord, in answer to this, took occasion to deliver to the company, at the table, the parable of the marriage-supper: 'A certain man,' said he, made a great supper, and bade many; and sent his servant at supper-time, to say to them that were bidden, Come: for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuses. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, go out quickly into the streets, and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled: for I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden, shall taste of my supper.'

By this parable, our Lord elegantly and beautifully described the infidelity of the Jews, and their final rejection of the heavenly message, while the poor, blind, despised Gentiles, brought by a powerful grace, like the persons who were compelled to come in from

the highways and hedges, would be enabled to believe in the Son of God, and become thereby partakers of those blessings, which the unbelieving Jews rejected and despised.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JESUS *being surrounded by vast multitudes of People, adviseth those who are willing to be his disciples, to examine beforehand their resolution in Case of Persecutions. The Pharisees murmur at* CHRIST *for receiving Sinners: He delivers the Parable of the lost Sheep, and Piece of Silver; of the Prodigal Son, and of the unjust Steward.* CHRIST *reproveth the Hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who were covetous, and derided him: and delivers the Parable of the rich Man, and Lazarus the Beggar.*

AFTER our blessed Saviour had departed from the Pharissee's house, great multitudes of people thronged about him, to hear his doctrine, and to behold his wondrous works: but the people in general, mistook the nature of his kingdom; for it was the general expectation that he was going to establish the Messiah's throne in Jerusalem, and from thence to conquer all the nations in the world, and render them tributary to his power.

As our Lord well knew that the people followed him with such expectations, he took the first opportunity to undeceive them, and to declare in the plainest terms, that his kingdom was not of this world, and, of consequence, those who followed him for temporal advantage, would be sure to find themselves mistaken; for, on the contrary, his disciples must expect to be persecuted from city to city, and hated of all men for his name's sake. And he further observed, that it was necessary for all who would be his true followers, to prefer his service to the riches, grandeur, and pleasures of the world, and to manifest by their conduct, that they had a greater value for him, than for the dearest objects of their affections: *If any man come to me,* said he, *and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea,*

and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

And to shew the folly of expecting to partake of the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, while they preferred their worldly attachments to our great Redeemer, he compared the case of such persons to that of an unthinking builder, and of a rash and forward warrior: the former was obliged to leave his structure unfinished, because he had foolishly begun the building before he had computed the cost; and the latter reduced to the disgrace, either of being shamefully defeated, or meanly suing for peace, because he had rashly declared war before he had compared his own strength with that of the enemy: *So likewise*, added our great Redeemer, *whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*

The fame of the miracles which JESUS daily wrought, and the divine discourses which he delivered, being spread in the most obscure and unpolite parts of the country, several persons of infamous lives, and abandoned characters, came amongst the crowds which pressed to hear him. These persons, conscious of their own unworthiness, approached our great Redeemer with the highest reverence, and heard him with the most respectful and steady attention. This opportunity was readily embraced by the great Saviour of sinners, who, far from upbraiding them with their former wickedness, or spurning them from him with contempt, kindly condescended to instruct them in those things which concerned their everlasting peace, and not only taught them in the fields, but went with them to their houses, and kindly condescended to teach them the nature of his kingdom, and lead them in the way of eternal life and happiness.

This condescending goodness in our great Redeemer, was highly offensive to the proud, self-conceited,

self-righteous Pharisees; they wanted to be accepted on the footing of their own worthiness, and could not bear the thoughts of the infinite mercy of God, manifested to the greatest of sinners; and, therefore, with hearts full of envious pride, they advanced it as a ground of reproach against our great Redeemer, that this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. Their pride could not bear the thought, that these persons whom they so much despised, should be looked upon by our Saviour with more kindness than themselves; and they thought his condescension unworthy the character of a prophet. They had no other views of divine acceptance, than such as had an immediate reference to the law; and the infinite mercy of God to sinners, manifested in the gospel of his Son, was what they could not understand; our great Redeemer therefore, to convince them of their ignorance, to check their abominable pride and self-sufficiency, to display the extensive and abundant mercy of God to sinful man, and to vindicate his own conduct, in conversing with the meanest and most contemptible persons, proposed three parables for their consideration.

The first of these parables was that of the lost sheep, which the Divine Instructor delivered in the following words: 'What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost:' Thus, by the natural turn of the human mind, which is restless and uneasy under the mortification of losing part of its property, and fixes with such eager attention on that which it has lost, that it overlooks those valuable objects which it has in possession, our great Redeemer describes the regard which God has to his people while they wander from him in a lost, perishing con-

dition; and by the joy which expands the human heart, when that which had long been given up for lost, is recovered; our Lord displays the kind reception which the worst of sinners will find, when they are made sensible of their evil ways, and are enabled to believe in the Son of God for life and salvation. And in this elegant, well-chosen parable, he further describes the joy of the heavenly inhabitants, when any of the sheep of Christ, who have long wandered from his fold, are convinced of their desperate condition, humbled under a sense of their unworthiness and wickedness, and are enabled to return: *I say unto you,* said he, *that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, that need no repentance.*

There is no person on earth so just and holy, and whose conduct hath been so regular, and uniformly correct, as to need no repentance; but the proud Pharisees, to whom our Lord directed these parables, would fain have been esteemed by the world as such persons; and these are particularly referred to in this representation, which was intended to display the amazing and infinite extent of divine forgiveness. A second parable which our great Redeemer published with the same view, was that of the lost piece of silver: 'Either,' said the divine instructor, 'what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and search diligently till she find it? and when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and neighbours together, saying, rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I have lost: Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.'

This parable is founded on the same principles, and published with the same design as the former, only the case and circumstances are varied; and our great Redeemer condescends in various forms and methods

of address to inculcate the same truth. The infinite mercy of God to sinners, and the kind reception they will find, when they are enabled to repent and return, is the great doctrine which runs through his gospel; and this is the great design of all his undertakings; to accomplish this, to remove every difficulty which attended it, to overcome and subdue every power which opposed it, and to publish the glad-tidings to a sinful world, he left the glories of the heavenly regions, he veiled the dignity and glory of his heavenly nature and condescended to become man; he was a partaker of the evils consequent on sin, that sinful men might be delivered from them; he was *a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*, that we might be partakers of substantial and eternal joy; and he died that we might live. To publish this great truth, and to prevail on the world to receive it, was the whole design of his ministry; every doctrine he advanced, every miracle which he wrought, had a natural tendency to promote this benevolent design; and this great end, in various forms of instruction, and various methods of address, he invariably pursued during the time of his abode on earth. And that no method of address, no form of instruction, might be omitted, which would powerfully operate on the mind and prepare it for the reception of a truth, so worthy of God, so friendly to man, our Lord condescended to appeal to the feelings of humanity; and from the natural affection which an offended father feels for a repenting son, he urged the certainty and the extent of divine forgiveness.

The parable which our great Redeemer proposed with this view, is the finest picture of nature; it contains all the beauties of just description, and is particularly calculated to engage the attention and affect the heart: the evangelist Luke hath given it in the following words: *A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his Father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he di-*

vided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his eldest son was in the field; and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, thy brother is come: and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in; therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering, said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment, and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots

thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found. Luke xv. 11. to the end.

The design of this parable is manifested at first sight, and stands a beautiful and unfading memorial of the fullness, the freeness, and extent of divine mercy, to the greatest of sinners; it not only declares that it is the fixed determination of heaven to forgive, and that mercy is an essential attribute of deity, the brightest star in the eternal crown; but it shews that this glorious disposition of heaven to forgive, entirely coincides with the feelings of humanity; for the eternal God condescends to appeal to that paternal tenderness which he hath planted in the human breast, in vindication of his own conduct in pardoning sinners, and in explanation of the nature and extent of his mercy.

If this parable be applied to the particular case with which it stands connected, it contains a reproof which the blessed JESUS directed to the Pharisees for their murmuring at his condescending kindness to publicans and sinners; and hereby they are taught that if they would resemble the holy and happy inhabitants of the celestial regions, they would not murmur and complain, and look down with envious pride, and sullen contempt while he conversed with those who were noted for being habitually and prevailingly wicked, but would rejoice to see such persons pursue those methods which might tend to their reformation and final salvation; nor would the gladness of heart they might express on this occasion, be any reproach to that strictness and purity which they value themselves upon; 'for there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.

Our Lord having thus vindicated his own conduct, in his condescending kindness to publicans and sinners, by shewing the vast extent of divine mercy, and the pleasure which the happy inhabitants of the heavenly regions take in the pardon of the worst of sinners, and their restoration to divine favour; he then delivered a parable to impress on the minds of his hearers the necessity of attending to the concerns of futurity. This he exemplified in the case of the unjust steward, who being warned by his lord to give up his stewardship, took such measures as were likely to procure him a subsistence when he had lost his present employment: 'There was,' said our great Redeemer, 'a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship; I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, how much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, an hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, and how much owest thou? And he said, an hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are wiser in their generation, than the children of light.' The scope of our Lord's argument in this passage, is apparently this: as a prudent thought for futurity, and a steady pursuit of those means which tend to prevent apprehended evils, though those means may not be approved as lawful in themselves, are sufficient to denominate a person wise: with what earnest attention, and unremitting application ought those

who have eternity in view, to pursue the precepts of heavenly wisdom, and to make all lesser events subservient to the greater end of obtaining eternal happiness: 'And I say unto you, added our great Redeemer, 'make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.'

The Pharisees, whose hearts were set upon the things of this world, and who had but very feeble and contracted views of eternal things, derided this doctrine of our great Redeemer; but he after giving them a seasonable reproof, produced by a striking and most remarkable parable, to shew the vanity of riches, and the vast importance of eternal things: 'There was,' said he, 'a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried: and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, father Abraham have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, son, remember that thou, in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you, there is a great gulph fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot: neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house; for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him,

they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.'

This parable is the most awful and alarming, and the most fully demonstrative of the immortality of the soul, and it's existence in a separate state, of any we meet with in the sacred volume: the imagery is so beautiful, and it is drawn in such lively colours, that it has rather been looked upon as an history than a parable in all ages of the church; many of the most affecting, the most awful and important lessons may be learned from it, and such sentiments are here displayed, as are not to be found in any other part of the gospel.

In the first place, we learn the shortness and uncertainty of this present state, and how little the attainment of vast possessions, in this world, conduces to the best interest of mankind. We have here held up to our view, a rich man, in all the grandeur, glory, and profusion of opulence, surrounded with all the honours, and partaking of all the pleasures which earth can give: *The rich man's wealth*, the wisest of men informs us, *is his strong city: and as an high wall in his own conceit.* The rich man thinks that his riches entitle him to every honour, and to the participation of every thing which can be enjoyed: but how is he pained to find himself most deplorably mistaken, when the mind, satiated with enjoyment, and surfeited with pleasure, grows sick of delight; amidst the abundance of riches, the soul starves, it finds nothing that is consistent with its spiritual nature, and would pine for want of solid enjoyment in the possession of a whole material world.

But how short and uncertain are those sickly joys,

those surfeiting pleasures which the rich man is able to partake of: *The rich man*, we are informed, *died, and was buried.* The pomp and pageantry, the luxury and all the consequence in the world which riches give their possessor, will not enable him to face the great king of terrors, Death: and as the utmost profusion of riches, cannot enable their possessor to face the pale tyrant with composure, neither can they bribe him to one moment's delay: *No man hath power to retain the spirit in the day of death:* the soul, all black and horrid with guilt, trembles at the approach of the eternal world, and with vast amazement and terror, strives to evade the awful stroke, but all in vain: *there is no discharge in that war:* the case admits of no refusal or delay: the unhappy mortal falls, and all that his riches can do, is only to carry him with prodigious pomp and splendour to the grave.

From this awful and affecting parable, we likewise learn the state of the dead, and the capacity of the separated soul, to receive happiness or misery before the resurrection of the body; *The rich man died, and was buried*, we are informed, and what then? Did he enter into rest, or did he remain in a state of insensibility until the day of resurrection? Neither of these: but *in hell he lifted up his eyes.* The unhappy mortal's pleasures and sensual gratifications are all past; and now, all naked, defenceless, and forlorn, he falls headlong into the depths of misery and woe: the black regions of horror and despair are now his portion: he lies in inexpressible torment, and, amidst these fiery regions, sees nothing but what tends to increase and aggravate his woes: *He lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.* The poor beggar that lay at his gate, all covered with sores, died and was buried, and in the dust lost all his meanness, and was equal to the richest man on earth: there is no pre-eminence in the grave, *for the small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master.* But how great the

difference between the poorest saint and richest sinner; Lazarus, at his death, was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, while the rich man descended into hell, and lift up his eyes in torment.

Thus having reprimanded the Pharisees, he took occasion to speak of affronts and offences, described their evil nature, and their dreadful punishment: 'It is impossible, said he, but that offences will come: but woe unto him through whom they come. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

Our Lord spake also against a quarrelsome temper in his servants, especially in the ministers and teachers of religion, prescribed a seasonable and prudent reprehension of the fault, accompanied with forgiveness on the person injured, as the best means of disarming the temptations that may arise from thence: 'Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn to thee, saying, I repent; thou shall forgive him.'

This discourse on forgiveness, uttered at a time when the Pharisees had just upbraided him, by calling him a false teacher, sufficiently proves how truly he forgave them all the personal injuries they had committed against him; and should be a powerful recommendation of that amiable virtue, the forgiveness of injuries.

However beautiful these discourses of our Saviour appear, when examined with attention, they seem to have staggered the faith of his disciples and followers; perhaps they still imagined, that he would shortly erect a temporal kingdom, and distribute among them the rewards they expected for their services. If so,

they might well desire their Master to *increase their faith*: as discourses like these had a very different tendency from what might naturally have been expected from one who was going to establish the throne of David, and extend his sceptre over all the kingdoms of the earth; but however this be, our Saviour told them, that if they had the smallest degree of true faith, it would be sufficient for overcoming all temptations, even those which seem as difficult to be conquered, as the plucking up trees and planting them in the ocean: *If ye had faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, be thou plucked up by the root and be thou planted in the sea, and it shall obey you.* Luke xvii. 6.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Sickness and Death of Lazarus: JESUS *receives an Account thereof; and, in his Way to Bethany, he heals ten Lepers in a village of Samaria: He arrives at Bethany, and raiseth Lazarus to Life, after he had been dead four Days: Many Jews believe: The Pharisees hold a council against* JESUS: *Caiaphas prophesieth:* JESUS *retireth to Ephraim, a City on the Borders of the Wilderness, where he sheweth the spiritual Nature of the Kingdom of God, foretelleth the Destruction of the Jewish State, and instructeth his Disciples concerning the coming of the Son of Man.* JESUS *delivers the Parable of the unjust Judge, and importunate Widow, and that of the Pharisee and the Publican: He answereth the Question of the Pharisees concerning Divorces: He receiveth the little Children with Tenderness, that were brought unto him, and blesseth them.*

SHORTLY after our blessed Saviour had finished these discourses, one of his friends, named Lazarus, fell sick at Bethany, a village two miles from Jerusalem, but at a great distance from the countries beyond Jordan, where JESUS was now preaching the gospel. The sisters of Lazarus, finding his sickness was of a dangerous kind, thought proper to send an account of it to JESUS; being firmly persuaded, that he who had cured so many strangers, would readily come and give health to one whom he loved in so tender a manner; *Lord*, said they, *behold he whom thou lovest is sick:* they did not add, come down and heal him, make haste and save him from the grave; it was sufficient for them to propose their necessities to their Lord, who was both able and willing to help them in their distress.

When Jesus heard that, he said, this sickness is not unto death; words which were doubtless carried to

Martha and Mary, and must strangely surprise them, and exercise both their's and his disciples faith; since it is probable, that before the messenger arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had expired. Soon after JESUS positively assured his disciples, that Lazarus was dead.

St. Luke, in the beginning of his account, tells us, that JESUS loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus; and that after he had received the message, he abode two days in the same place where he was. His design in this might be to insi[illegible], that his lingering so long after the message came, did not proceed from a want of concern for his friends, but happened according to the counsels of his own wisdom: for the length of time which Lazarus lay in the grave, put his death beyond all possibility of doubt, removed every suspicion of fraud, and consequently afforded JESUS a fit opportunity of displaying the love he bore to Lazarus, as well as his own almighty power, in his undoubted resurrection from the dead. His sisters, indeed, were by this means kept a while in painful anxiety, on account of their brother's life, and at last were pierced by the sorrow of seeing him die: yet they must surely think themselves abundantly recompensed, by the evidence accruing to the gospel from this astonishing miracle, as well as by the inexpressible surprise of joy they felt, when they again had their brother restored from the dead.

At the expiration of two days, JESUS said to his disciples, *Let us go into Judea again*, John xi. 7. His disciples were astonished at this proposal, and the recollection of his late danger in that country alarmed them: *Master*, said they, *the Jews of late thought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?* Wilt thou hazard thy life amongst those who desired nothing more than to find an opportunity of killing thee? *Jesus answered, are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day he stumbleth not because he seeth the light of this world: but if a man walk in*

the night he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.

Thus he intended to inform his disciples, that they had no reason to fear, seeing his day was appointed, and the light of the Almighty was in him; that he could not stumble nor fall, before the night of his passion approached, but that night was coming when no man could work. JESUS having thus removed their groundless apprehensions and strengthened their faith, that he might clearly explain them the cause of his going into Judea again, told them, *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.* The disciples understanding his discourse in a literal sense, replied, *Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well;* his distemper is abated, and he in all probability is recovering. It would be, therefore, highly unreasonable in us to take two days journey only to awake him out of his sleep. Thus they covered their fears, and hinted to their Master, that it would be far safer to continue where they were, than to take a hazardous journey into Judea. They were, however mistaken: for the evangelist informs us, that he *spake of his death, but they thought, that he had spoken of taking rest in sleep.* JESUS, therefore, to remove any doubts, said plainly to them, *Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes, that I was not there, to the intent that you might believe:* I am glad for your sakes, that I was not in Judea before he died; for had I been there, and restored him to his health, your faith in me, as the Messiah, must have wanted the great confirmation it shall now receive, by your beholding me raise him thus miraculously from the dead.

JESUS CHRIST having thus given his disciples a proof of his divine knowledge, and of the designs of providence in the death of Lazarus, added, *Nevertheless let us go again unto him.* Thus JESUS, who could have raised Lazarus without opening his lips or rising from his seat, leaves his place of retirement beyond

Jordan, and takes a long journey into Judea, where the Jews lately attempted to kill him; because his being present in person, and raising Lazarus again to life, before so many witnesses at Bethany, where he died, and was so well known, would be the means of bringing the men of that, and of future ages, to believe in his doctrine, so well fitted to prepare them for a resurrection to eternal life; an admirable proof, as an emblem of which, he gave them in this miracle.

Our Lord having thus declared his resolution of returning into Judea, and Thomas conceiving nothing less than destruction from such a journey, yet unwilling to forsake his master, said, *Let us also go that we may die with him.* Let us not forsake our Master in this dangerous journey, but accompany him into Judea, that if the Jews, whose inveteracy we are well acquainted with, should take away his life, we may also die with him.

This Journey being thus resolved on, JESUS departed with his disciples, and in his way to Bethany, passed through Samaria and Galilee; 'And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off; and they lifted up their voices, and said, JESUS Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that as they went they were cleansed.' Luke xvii. 12. &c.

One of these miserable objects, was a native of that country, who perceiving that his cure was completed, came back praising God for the great mercy he had received; he had before kept at a distance from our Saviour, but being now sensible that he was entirely clean, approached his benefactor, that all might have an opportunity of beholding the miracle, and fell on his face at his feet, thanking him in the most humble manner, for his condescension in healing him of so terrible a

disease. JESUS, in order to intimate, that those who were enlightened with the knowledge of the truth ought at least, to have shewn as great a sense of piety and gratitude as this Samaritan, asked, 'were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? There are not found that have returned to give glory to God save this stranger.

Our Saviour and his disciples now continued their journey towards Bethany, where he was informed by some of the inhabitants of the village, that Lazarus was not only dead, as he had foretold, but had now lain in the grave four days. The afflicted sisters were overwhelmed with sorrow: so that many of the Jews from Jerusalem, came to comfort them on the occasion.

It appears, the news of our Lord's coming, had reached Bethany before he arrived at that village; for Martha, the sister of Lazarus, being informed of his approach, went out and met him, but Mary, who was of a more sedate and contemplative disposition, sat still in the house. No sooner was she come into the presence of JESUS, than, in excess of grief she poured forth her complaint; *Lord*, said she, *if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.* If thou hadst complied with the message we sent thee, I well know that thy interest from heaven had prevailed, my brother had been cured of his disease, and delivered from the dark chambers of death.

Martha entertained a high opinion of our Saviour's power; she believed that death did not dare to approach his presence; and consequently, if JESUS had arrived at Bethany before her brother's dissolution, he had not fallen a victim to the king of terrors: but imagined, that it was not in his power to heal the sick, at a distance, though, at the same time, she seemed to have some dark and imperfect hopes, that our blessed Lord would still do something for her; *But I know*, said she, *that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of*

God, God, will give it thee. She thought that JESUS could obtain whatsoever he desired by prayer, and therefore, did not found her hopes on his power, but on the power of God, through his intercession. She doubtless knew, that the great Redeemer of mankind had raised the daughter of Jairus and the widow's son of Nain, from the dead; but seems to have considered her brother's resurrection as much more difficult, because he had been longer dead.

But our blessed Saviour, who was willing to encourage this imperfect faith of Martha, answered, *Thy brother shall rise again.* As these words were delivered in an indefinite sense, with regard to time, Martha understood them only as an argument of consolation, drawn from the general resurrection, and accordingly answered, *I know that he shall rise again at the resurrection at the last day.* She was firmly persuaded of that important article of the christian faith, *the resurrection of the dead*; at which important hour she believed her brother would rise from the chambers of the dust. And here she seems to have terminated all her hopes; not thinking that the Son of God would now call her brother from the sleep of death. JESUS, therefore, to instruct her in this great truth, replied, *I am the resurrection, and the life.* I am the author of the resurrection, the fountain and giver of that life they shall then receive; and therefore can, with the same ease raise the dead now as at the last day: *He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die. Believeth thou this?* To which Martha answered, *Yea Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ the Son of God, which should come into the world.* I believe that thou art the true Messiah, so long promised by the prophets, and therefore believe that thou art capable of performing, by thy power, every thing thou art pleased to undertake.

She now seemed to entertain some confused expec-

tations of her brother's immediate resurrection; and leaving JESUS in the field, ran and called her sister, according to his order, being willing that both Mary and her companions should be witnesses of this great miracle.

Mary accordingly, no sooner heard that JESUS was come, than she immediately left her Jewish comforters, who only increased the weight of her grief, and flew to her Saviour: and the Jews, who suspected she was going to weep over the grave of her brother, followed her to that great prophet, who was going to remove all her sorrows. Thus the Jews, who came from Jerusalem to comfort the two mournful sisters, were brought to the grave of Lazarus, and made witnesses of his resurrection.

Mary having approached the great Redeemer of mankind, fell prostrate at his feet, and in a flood of tears poured out her complaint, *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.* No wonder the compassionate JESUS was moved at so affecting a scene: on this side stood Martha pouring forth a flood of tears; at his feet lay the affectionate Mary weeping and lamenting her dear departed brother; while the Jews, who came to comfort the afflicted sisters, unable to confine their grief, joined the solemn mourning, and mixed their friendly tears in witness of their love for the departed Lazarus, and in testimony to the justice of the sisters grief, for the loss of so amiable, so deserving a brother. JESUS could not behold the affliction of the two sisters and their friends, without having a share in it himself; his heart was melted at the mournful scene, *he groaned in spirit, and was troubled.*

However, to keep them no longer in suspense, he asked them, where they had buried Lazarus; not that he was ignorant where the body of the deceased was laid: he who knew that he was dead, when so far distant from him, and could raise him up by a single word,

must know where his remains were deposited; to which they answered, *Lord come and see.* The Son of God, now to prove that he was not only God, but a most compassionate man, and to shew us that the tender affections of a human heart, when kept in due bounds; that friendly sorrow, when not immoderate, and directed to proper ends, is consistent with the highest sanctity of the soul, joined in the general mourning: he wept, even at the time that he was going to give the most ample proofs of his almighty power.

Thus the Jews were convinced that he loved Lazarus exceedingly; but some of them interpreted this circumstance to his disadvantage: for, according to their mean way of judging, they fancied that he had suffered him to fall by the stroke of death, for no other reason in the world, but for want of power to rescue him. And thinking the miracle, said to have been wrought on the blind man, at the feast of tabernacles, at least as difficult as the curing an accute distemper, they called the former in question, because the latter had been neglected; *Could not this man,* said they, *which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?*

But Jesus took no notice of these questions; but grieving at the hardness of their hearts, and blindness of their infidelity, groaned again within himself, as he walked towards the sepulchre of the dead. At his coming to the grave, he said, *Take ye away the stone.* To which Martha answered, *Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days:* or as the passage may be better rendered, hath lain in the grave four days. She meant to insinuate that her brother's resurrection was not to be expected. But Jesus gave her a solemn reproof, to teach her that there was nothing impossible with God; and that the power of the Almighty is not to be circumscribed within the narrow bounds of human reason, *Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?*

Martha's objections being thus obviated, she with the rest, waited the great event in silence; and in pursuance of the command of the Son of God, took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. JESUS had on many occasions, publicly appealed to his own miracles, as the proofs of his mission, though he did not generally make a formal address to the Father before he worked this miracle; but being now to raise Lazarus from the dead, he prayed for his resurrection, to convince the spectators that it could not be affected without an immediate interposition of the divine power; 'Father,' said he, 'I thank thee, that thou hast heard me; and I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me: I entertained no doubt of thy empowering me to do this miracle, and therefore, did not pray for my own sake; I well knew that thou hearest me always? I prayed for the sake of the people, to convince them that thou lovest me, hast sent me, and art continually owning the work I am come to do.

Having returned thanks to his Father, for this opportunity of displaying his glory, *He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.* This loud and efficacious call of the Son of God, awakened the dead; the breathless clay was instantly re-animated, and he who had lain four days in the chambers of the tomb, obeyed immediately the powerful sound: 'And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin; JESUS saith unto them, loose him and let him go.' It would have been the least part of the miracle, had JESUS, by his powerful word, unloosed the napkins wherewith Lazarus was bound; but he brought him out in the same manner he was lying, and ordered the spectators to loose him, that they might be better convinced of the miracle; for, in taking off the grave-clothes, they had the fullest evidence both of his death and resurrection. As on the one hand, the manner which he was

swathed, must soon have killed him, had he been alive when buried; and consequently demonstrated, beyond all exception, that Lazarus had been dead several days before JESUS called him again to life. Besides, in stripping him, the linen offered both to their eyes and smell, abundant proof of his putrifaction; and, by that means, convinced them that he had not been in a trance, but was really dead; on the other hand, by his lively countenance appearing, when the napkin was removed, his fresh colour, and his active vigour, they who came near and handled him, must be convinced, that he was in perfect health, and had an opportunity of proving the truth of the miracle, by the closest examination. There is something extremely beautiful in our Lord's behaviour on this occasion; he did not utter one upbraiding word, either to the doubting sisters, or the malicious Jews, nor did he let fall one word of triumph or exultation: *Loose him and let him go*, were the only words we have recorded: he was in this, as on all other occasions, consistent with himself, a pattern of perfect humility and self-denial.

Such was the blessed work wrought by the Son of God at Bethany. And in the resurrection of Lazarus, thus corrupted, and thus raised by the powerful call of JESUS, we have a striking emblem, and a glorious earnest of the resurrection of our bodies from the grave at the last day; when the same powerful mandate, which spoke Lazarus again into being, shall collect the scattered particles of our bodies, and raise them to life.

So astonishing a miracle performed in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, before a multitude of spectators, many of them his enemies, could not fail of being the common topic of conversation, and of producing different effects upon different persons. Many believed that JESUS could be no other than the great Messiah so long promised; while others, who still expected a temporal prince, and therefore unwilling to acknowledge him for their Saviour, were filled with indigna-

tion, particularly the chief priests and elders. But this miracle, as well as all the rest he had wrought in confirmation of his mission, was too evident to be denied; and, therefore, they pretended that his whole intention was to establish a new sect in religion, which would endanger both their church and nation: *Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council,* and said, *What do we? for this man doth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.*

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The common people, astonished at his miracles, will if we do not take care to prevent it, certainly set him up for the Messiah; and the Romans, under pretence of a rebellion, will deprive us both of our liberty and religion. Accordingly, they came to a resolution to put him to death: this resolution was not, however, unanimous; for Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and other disciples of our Saviour, then members of the council, urged the injustice of what they proposed to do, from the consideration of his miracles and innocence: but Caiaphas the high priest, from a principle of human policy, told them, that the nature of government often required certain acts of injustice, in order to procure the safety of the state: *Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.*

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The council now having determined to put JESUS to death, deliberated, for the future, only upon the best methods of effecting it; and, in all likelihood, agreed to issue a proclamation, promising a reward to any person who would deliver him into their hands. For this reason, our blessed Saviour did not now go up to Jerusalem, though he was within two miles of it; but returned to Ephraim, a city on the borders of the wilderness, where he abode with his disciples, being unwilling to go too far into the country, because the passover, at which he was to suffer, was at hand.

While our Lord abode in Ephraim, the Pharisees asked him, when the kingdom of the Messiah was to begin. We have more than once observed, that the Jews had very grand ideas of the kingdom they expected this great Son of David would establish, the number of his subjects, the strength of his armies, and the pomp and magnificence of his court. It is therefore no wonder, that they were very desirous of having that empire speedily erected: but our Saviour, to correct this mistaken notion, told them, that the Messiah's kingdom did not consist in any external pomp of government, erected in some particular country, by the terror of arms, and desolation of war; but in the subjection of the minds of men, and in rendering them conformable to the laws of the Almighty, which was to be effected by a new dispensation of religion, and this dispensation was already begun. It was therefore needless for them to seek in this or that place for the kingdom of God, as it had been already preached among them by CHRIST and his apostles, and confirmed by innumerable miracles: *The kingdom of God*, said he, *cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.* Luke xvii. 20 &c.

Soon after speaking these words to the Pharisees, he addressed himself to his disciples, and, in the hearing of the people, prophesied the destruction of the Jewish state: whose constitution, both religious and civil was the chief difficulty that opposed the erection of his kingdom: but because love and compassion were eminent parts of our Saviour's temper, he mentioned that dreadful catastrophe in such a manner, as might tend to the reformation and profit of his hearers. He informed them, that the prelude to this final destruction would be an universal distress; when they should passionately wish for the personal presence of the Messiah to comfort them, but would be denied their request: 'The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall

not see it.' He next cautioned them against deceivers, which in this time of affliction, would endeavour to draw the people after them, in order to support their own power: *And they shall say to you, see here: or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of Man be in his day. But he first must suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.*

But the coming of the Son of Man shall be sudden and unexpected: he will come in his own strength, and with great power; he will throw down all opposition, destroy his enemies with swift destruction, and establish his religion and government in a great part of the world, as suddenly as lightening darts from one part of the heaven to the other: *but before these things come to pass, he must suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.*

And, notwithstanding this sudden destruction and calamity that was to overwhelm the Jews, he told them their stupidity would be like that of the old world, at the time of the deluge, or that of Sodom before the city was destroyed: *And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded: but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day he which shall be upon the house-top, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife.*

A better example than that of Lot's wife could not have been produced: for if any of his hearers, through an immoderate love of the world, should be prevailed on, in order to save their goods, after they were admonished from heaven of their danger, by the signs which prognosticated the destruction of Jerusalem; or if any of them, through want of faith, should think, that the calamities predicted to fall on the nation, would not be either so great or sudden as he had declared, and did not use the precaution of a speedy flight; they might behold in Lot's wife an example both of their sin and of their punishment: he added, that those who endeavoured to save their lives, by flying into the city, should meet the destruction they were endeavouring to avoid; whereas, those who retired into the open towns and defenceless villages, should be safe: 'Whosoev shall seek to save his life, shall lose it; and whosoe lose his life shall preserve it.'

Our blessed Lord, after making these predictions, spake the following parable, in order to excite them to a constant perseverance in prayer, and not to be so weary and faint in their minds, as to neglect this necessary duty.

There was in a city, said our Lord, a judge, who, being governed by atheistical principles, had no regard to the precepts of religion; and, being very powerful, did not regard what was said of him by men: so that all his decisions were influenced merely by passion or interest. In the same city was also a widow, who having no friends to assist her, was absolutely unable to defend herself from injuries, or procure redress for any she had received. In this deplorable situation, she had recourse to the unjust judge, in order to obtain satisfaction for some oppressive wrong she had lately received: but the judge was so abandoned to pleasure, that he refused, for a time, to listen to her request; he would not give himself the trouble to examine her case, though the crying injustice pleaded so powerfully for

this distressed widow. She was not however intimidated by his refusal: she incessantly importuned him, till, by repeated representations of her distress, she filled his mind with such displeasing ideas, that he was obliged to do her justice, merely to free himself from her importunity: *Though*, said he to himself, *I fear not God, nor regard man; yet, because this widow troubleth me I will avenge her; lest, by her continual coming she weary me.*

The sentiment, conveyed by our blessed Lord in this parable, is very beautiful: we hence learn, that the cries of the afflicted will, by being incessantly repeated, make an impression even on the stony hearts of wicked men, who glory in their impiety and laugh at all the precepts of justice, virtue, and religion; and, therefore, cannot fail of being regarded by the benevolent Father of the universe, who will listen to the petitions of his faithful servants, and pour on them the choicest of his blessings. *Hear*, said our gracious Lord, *what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.* Arguments of this kind, taken from the feeble goodness, or even from the imperfections of men, to illustrate the superior and infinite perfections of the Almighty were often made use of by the blessed JESUS, and with great success in working the conviction designed. It was indeed hardly possible to withstand such powerful appeals; they force their way directly into mens' hearts, bear down all opposition, and make a lasting impression on mens' minds.

Our blessed Lord having thus enforced the duty of prayer, in this expressive parable, asked the following apposite question, *Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* As if he had said, notwithstanding all the miracles I have wrought, and the excellent doctrines I have delivered, shall I find at my second coming, the faith among the children of

men, there is reason to expect? Will not most of them be found to have abandoned the faith, and wantonly ask, *Where is the promise of his coming?*

Our Lord delivered these discourses to the Pharisees, who were righteous in their own conceit, and despised others: but as these particulars are better illustrated by their opposites, he placed the character of this species of men, in opposition to those of the humble, describing the reception each class met with from the Almighty, in the parable of the Pharisee and Publican, who went up together to the temple at the time when the sacrifice was offered, to direct their petitions to the God of their fathers.

The Pharisee, having a great opinion of his own righteousness, went far into the court of the temple that he might be as near the place of the divine residence as possible: here he offered his prayer, giving God the praise of his supposed righteousness; and had he been possessed of any, he would have acted properly: 'God,' said he, 'I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.' Having thus commended himself to God, he wrapped himself up in his own righteousness, and giving the poor publican a scornful look, walked away, perhaps to transgress some of the weightier matters of the law, judgment, justice, and truth, and to devour the houses of distressed widows and helpless orphans. But how different was the behaviour of the humble publican! Impressed with a deep sense of his own unworthiness, he would not even enter the courts of the temple, but standing afar off, he smote upon his breast, and in the bitterness of his soul, earnestly implored the mercy of omnipotence: 'And the publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner.'

Our blessed Lord added, I tell you, however ye may judge from external appearances, and whatever preference ye may give to this haughty Pharisee; I, who know and see the heart, declare unto you, that the publican retired from the temple accepted by his God, and blessed with the mercy which he implored, while the proud Pharisee was disregarded.

The present parable sufficiently indicates, that all the sons of men stand in need of mercy; both the strict Pharisee and the despised publican, with the whole race of mankind, are sinners; and consequently all must implore pardon of their benevolent Creator: we must all ascend to the temple, and there pour forth our prayers before the throne of grace; for there he has promised [illegible]er to be present, to grant the petitions of all who ask [illegible] sincerity and truth.

These parables were spoken in the town of Ephraim; and during our Lord's continuance in that city, the Pharisees asked him, Whether he thought it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? Our Saviour had twice before declared his opinion of this particular, once in Galilee, and once in Perea: it is therefore probable, that the Pharisees were not ignorant of his sentiments, and that they asked the question then, to find an opportunity of incensing the people against him, well knowing that the Israelites held the liberty which the law gave them of divorcing their wives as one of their chief privileges: but however that be, JESUS was far from fearing the popular resentment, and accordingly declared the third time against arbitrary divorces. The Pharisees then asked him why they were commanded by Moses to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? Insinuating, that Moses was so tender of their happiness, that he gave them liberty of putting away their wives, when they saw occasion. To which JESUS answered, *Because of the hardness of your hearts, Moses suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so:*

as unlimited divorces were not permitted in the state of innocence, so neither shall they be under the gospel dispensation.

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away, doth commit adultery.

At which decision the disciples were greatly surprised; and though they held their peace while the Pharisees were present, yet they did not fail to ask our Lord the reason on which he founded his determination, when they were returned home: And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, 'Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.'

Unlimited divorces being prevalent among the Jews, gave great encouragement to family quarrels, were very destructive of happiness, and hindered the education of their tender offspring; besides, it greatly tended to make their children lose that reverence for them which is due to parents, as it was hardly possible for the children to avoid engaging in the quarrel. Our Saviour's prohibition, therefore, of these divorces is founded on the strongest reasons, and greatly tends to promote the welfare of society.

Our Lord having, in the course of his ministry, performed innumerable cures in different parts of the country, several persons thinking, perhaps that his power would be as great in preventing as in removing distempers, brought their children to him, desiring that he would put his hands upon them and bless them. The disciples, however, mistaking the intention, were angry with the persons, and rebuked them for endeavouring to give this trouble to their Master. But JESUS no sooner saw it,

than he was greatly displeased with his disciples, and ordered them not to hinder parents from bringing their children to him: 'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God.' That is, the church militant on earth, and that triumphant in heaven, are composed of persons who resemble little children in humility and meekness. Accordingly, taking them up in his arms, he blessed them with his usual benevolence.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CHRIST departs from Ephraim, and, in his Journey to Jerusalem by the Way of Jericho, he instructeth a young Man how to attain eternal Life, and how to become perfect: He sheweth how hard it is for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of God; and promiseth great Rewards to his Disciples, and to all who have forsaken ought to follow him: He delivers the Parable of the Labourers, who were hired at different Hours to work in the Vineyard: He foretelleth his own Death, and Resurrection; and putteth by the ambitious Suit of the Sons of Zebedee.

THE time of our dear Lord's passion drawing near, he departed from Ephraim, and repaired by the way of Jericho, towards Jerusalem: but before he arrived at Jericho, a ruler of the synagogue came running to him, and kneeling down before him, asked him, 'Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?' Matt. xix. 16. Though this young ruler pretended to pay great honour to our dear Redeemer, yet the whole was no more than a piece of hypocrisy: for though he styled him good, yet he did not believe that he was sent from God, as sufficiently appears from his refusing to observe the counsel given them by JESUS; nor could his artful insinuations escape the piercing eye of the great Saviour of the world; he well knew his secret intentions, and beheld the inmost recesses of his soul; and accordingly rebuked him for his hypocritical address, before he answered his question: *Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God.* But as he had desired the advice of our blessed Saviour, who never refused it to any of the sons of men, he readily answered his question, by telling him, that he must observe all the moral precepts of the law; there being a necessary connection between the duties of piety towards the Almighty, and of justice and temperance towards men, the latter of which, were

much more difficult to counterfeit than the former; 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? JESUS said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?'

These commandments were, doubtless, understood by the young ruler, in the vague sense put upon them by the doctors and interpreters of the law; and, therefore, the character he here gave of himself might be very just: for, though he was far from being a person of true probity and virtue, he might have appeared, in the sight of men, as a person of a very fair character: and having maintained that character, notwithstanding his great riches, he certainly deserved commendation; and therefore, might be loved by that benevolent person who left the bosom of his Father, to redeem lost mankind: but he was, at the same time, very faulty with regard to his love of sensual pleasures, a sin which might have escaped even his own observation, though it could not escape the all-seeing eye of the Son of God. Our blessed Saviour, therefore, willing to make him sensible of this secret desire of possessing the riches of this world, told him, that if he aimed at perfection, he should distribute his possessions among the poor and indigent, and become his disciple: *If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

The young man did not expect this condition, he was astonished at it, and without making the least reply, retired, filled with sorrow, being very unwilling to part with his large estates: *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

The pernicious influence of riches over the minds of the children of men, being thus instanced, our blessed Saviour cautioned his disciples against fixing their minds on things of such dangerous tendency, by shewing how very difficult it was for a rich man to procure an habitation in the region of eternal happiness: 'Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, who then can be saved? But JESUS beheld them, and said unto them, with men this is impossible: but with God all things are possible.

By this it appears, that if a man be not assisted by the grace of God, it will be impossible for him to obtain the happy rewards of the kingdom of heaven; but, by the assistance of grace, which the Almighty never refuses to those who seek it with their whole heart, it is very possible.

But the disciples of our blessed Lord were far from being satisfied with this answer, as they had doubtless often reflected with pleasure on the high posts they were to enjoy in their Master's kingdom. Peter seems particularly to save been disappointed; and therefore addressed his Master in the name of the rest, begging him to remember, that his apostles had actually done what the young man had refused: they had abandoned their relations, their friends, their possessions, and their employments, on his account: and, therefore, desired to know what reward they were to expect, for these instances of their obedience. To which JESUS replied, that they should not fail of a reward, even in this life: for immediately after his resurrection, when he ascended to his Father, and entered on his mediatorial office, they should be advanced to the honour of judging the twelve tribes of Israel; that is, of ruling the church of

CHRIST, which they were to plant in different parts of the earth ; *Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Our Lord having given this answer to Peter, he next mentioned the rewards his other disciples should receive, both in this world, and in that which is to come: they, said he, who have forsaken all for my sake, shall be no loosers in the end; their benevolent Father, who intends to give them possessions in the heavenly Canaan, will not fail to support them, during their long and painful journey to that happy country, and raise them up friends who shall assist them with those necessaries they might have expected from their relations, had they not left them for my sake. Divine Providence will take care that they have every thing valuable that can be given them by their relations, or they could desire from large possessions: they shall, indeed, be fed with the bread of sorrow, but this shall produce joys, to which all the earthly pleasures bear no proportion; and, in the end, obtain everlasting life: they shall leave this vale of tears, with all its pains and sorrows, behind them, and fly to the bosom of their Almighty Father, the fountain of life and joy, where, for all the sufferings they have undergone in this world, they shall be infinitely rewarded.

According to this, many who are by their fellow-mortals, considered as the last of mankind, because of their sufferings, self-denials, and mortifications, shall be really first, not only in point of future reward, but even with regard to peesent satisfaction: *But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*

It seems these words were spoken to keep the disciples humble, as, in all probability, they at first understood the promise of their sitting on twelve thrones in a natural sense; so they were ready to construe every

expression to a temporal kingdom, which they still expected their Master would erect upon earth. Our blessed Lord, therefore, to remove all thoughts they might entertain of this kind, told them, that though he had described the rewards they were to expect for the ready obedience they had shewn to his commands, and the pains they were to take in propagating the gospel amongst the children of men; yet these rewards were spiritual, and not confined to the Jews alone, but extended also to the Gentiles, who, in point of time, should excel the Jews, and universally embrace the gospel before that nation was converted.

Our great Redeemer illustrated this doctrine with the parable of the house-holder, who at different hours of the day, hired labourers to work in the vineyard: 'The kingdom of heaven, says our blessed Saviour, is like unto a man that is an house-holder, which went out early in the morning, to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market place, and he said unto them, go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and finding others standing, saith unto them, why stand ye here all the day idle! They say unto him, because no man hath hired us. He said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So, when even was come, the lord of the vineyard said unto his steward, call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, these

last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that is thine, and go thy way: I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.' Matt. xx. 1—16.

Our blessed Saviour delivered the parable of the house-holder in such a manner, as, from the application he has made of it, it would not be difficult to interpret it. The dispensations of religion, which God gave to mankind in different parts of the world, are represented by the vineyard: the Jews, who were early members of the true church, and obliged to obey the law of Moses, are the labourers which the house-holder hired early in the morning; the Gentiles, who were converted at several times, by the various interpositions of Providence, to the knowledge and worship of the true God, are the labourers hired at the third, sixth, and ninth hour: and the invitation given at the eleventh hour, implies the calling of the Gentiles in every country, to live piously and virtuously. The law of Moses was a heavy yoke; and therefore, the obedience to its precepts was very elegantly represented, by bearing the heat and burden of the whole day: but the proselyted Gentiles paid obedience only to some particular precepts of the law, bore but parts of its weight, and were, therefore, represented by those who were hired, at the third, sixth, and ninth hours; while those Heathens, who regulated their conduct by the law of nature only, and esteemed the works of justice, piety, temperance and charity, as their whole duty, are beautifully represented as labouring in the cool of the evening, only one hour.

The time being come when each labourer was to receive his wages, they were all placed on an equal

footing; these rewards being the privileges and advantages of the gospel. The Jews who had borne the grievous yoke of the Mosaic ceremonies, murmured when they found the Gentiles were admitted to its privileges, without being subject to their ceremonial worship: but we must not urge the circumstance of the reward, so far as to fancy that either Jews or Gentiles merited the blessings of the gospel, by their having laboured faithfully in the vineyard, or having behaved well under their several dispensations. The gospel, with its blessings, was bestowed entirely by the free grace of God, and without any thing in men to merit it; besides, it was offered promiscuously to all, whether good or bad, and was embraced by persons of all characters. The conclusion of the parable deserves our utmost attention; we should often meditate upon it, and take care to make our calling and election sure.

Our Lord having finished these discourses, continued his journey towards Jerusalem, where the chief priests and elders, soon after the resurrection of Lazarus, issued a proclamation promising a reward to any one who should apprehend him. In all probability, this was the reason why the disciples were astonished at the alacrity of our Lord during this journey. While they themselves followed him trembling, Jesus, therefore thought proper to repeat the prophecies concerning his sufferings, in order to shew his disciples that they were entirely voluntary; adding that though the Jews should put him to death, yet instead of weakening, it should increase their faith, especially as he would rise again the third day from the dead: *Behold we go up to Jerusalem; and all things that are written by the prophets, concerning the Son of man, shall be accomplished: for he shall be delivered to the Gentiles and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.* Luke xviii. 31, 32, 33.

It must have given the greatest encouragement to

our Lord's disciples, had they understood and applied this prediction which was built upon the ancient prophecies, in a proper manner; but they were so ignorant in the scriptures, that they had no idea of what he meant: *And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.*

But the sons of Zebedee were so ignorant, that they thought their Master, by his telling them that he would rise again from the dead, meant that he would then erect his empire; and, accordingly, begged that he would confer on them the chief posts in his kingdom, which they expressed, by desiring to be seated, the one on his right hand, and the other on his left, in allusion to his placing the twelve apostles upon twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel.

Ever since our Saviour's transfiguration, the sons of Zebedee had conceived very high notions of his kingdom and possibly of their own merit also, because they had been admitted to behold that miracle; but JESUS told them, they were ignorant of the nature of the honor they requested; and since they desired to share with him in his glory asked them, if they were willing to share with him also in his sufferings; 'Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' Mat. xx. 22. The two disciples, ravished with the prospect of the dignity they were aspiring after, replied without hesitation, that they were both able and willing to share any hardship their Master might meet with in the way to his kingdom. To which he answered, that they should certainly share with him his troubles and afflictions: but that they had asked a favour which was not his to give: 'Ye shall drink, indeed, of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.'

The indignation of the rest of the disciples being raised by this ambitious request of the two brothers, and thinking themselves equally deserving the principal posts in the Messiah's kingdom, they were highly offended at the arrogance of the sons of Zebedee. Jesus, therefore, in order to restore harmony amongst his disciples, told them, that his kingdom was very different from those of the present world; and that the greatness of his disciples did not, like that of secular princes consist in reigning over others in an absolute and despotic manner: 'Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be administered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Jesus, being arrived at Jericho, giveth sight to two blind men near that Place; He visiteth Zaccheus the Publican, and delivers the Parable of a Nobleman who left Money with his Servants to trade with in his Absence: The Rulers give orders to apprehend him: Being arrived at Bethany, Mary anointeth his Feet: Judas murmureth at the Cost. Christ *rideth into Jerusalem upon an Ass, amidst the acclamations of the multitude, and weepeth over the City.*

OUR Lord with his disciples, and the multitude that accompanied him, being now arrived at Jericho, in their way to Jerusalem, a famous city of Palestine, and the second in the kingdom. Near this town Jesus cured two blind men, who sat by the road begging, and expressed their belief in him, as the Messiah: 'And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord thou Son of David.' Matt. xx. 29, 30, 31.

The Son of God stood still at this importunate request of the two men, and called them to him, that, by their manner of walking, spectators might be convinced that they were really blind. As soon as they approached him, he asked them, what they requested with such earnestness? To which the beggars answered, that they might receive their sight: *What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.* This request was not made in vain: their compassionate Saviour touched their eyes, and immediately they received sight, and followed him, glori-

fying and praising God. After conferring sight on these beggars, Zaccheus, chief of the publicans, having often heard of the fame of our Lord's miracles, was desirous of seeing his person; but the lowness of his stature prevented him from satisfying his curiosity, *he ran before, and climbed up a sycamore tree to see him; for he was to pass that way.* As JESUS approached the place where he was, *he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house.* Luke xix. 5.

At which condescension of our Lord, the publican expressed his joy, carried him to his house and shewed him all the marks of civility in his power. But the people when they saw he was going to the house of a publican, condemned his conduct, as not conformable to the character of a prophet. Zaccheus seems to have heard these unjust reflections; and, therefore was unwilling to justify himself before JESUS and his attendants: 'And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man, by false accusation, I restore him four fold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to thy house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

Further to convince the people that he acted agreeable to his character, in keeping company with publicans and sinners, our Lord told them, that the true intention of his coming was to recover those who had wandered from the paths of virtue, and restore them to the rightful owner: *The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.* While JESUS continued in the house of Zaccheus the publican, he spake a parable to his followers, who supposed, at his arrival in the royal city, he would erect the long-expected kingdom of the Messiah; 'A certain nobleman,' said he, 'went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and deliv-

ered to them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant; because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, be thou also over five cities. And another came saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layest not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.'

We have the characters of three sorts of men in this parable delineated by our blessed Saviour himself; namely, the true disciples of the Messiah, the hypocrites, and the openly prophane: and the treatment these servants met with, represents the final sentences that will be passed upon them by the awful Judge of

the whole earth. The true disciples shall be rewarded with the honors and pleasures of immortality; the hypocrites stripped of all the advantages they so often boasted, and loaded with eternal infamy, and the open enemies of CHRIST, in proportion to the degree of their guilt, shall suffer severe punishment.

Although this be the general sense of the parable; yet it has also a particular relation to the time when it was spoken; and was intended to teach the disciples, that though they might imagine that the Messiah's kingdom was speedily to be erected, and they were soon to partake of its happiness, yet this was not to happen before the death of their Master; that they themselves must perform a long and laborious course of services, before the received their eternal reward. That after his resurrection, when he had obtained the kingdom, he would return from his seat of majesty, and reckon with all his servants, and reward every one according to the improvements he had made in the trust committed to his care; and that he would execute, in an exemplary manner, his vengeance on those who refused to let him reign over them, and did all in their power to hinder the erection of his kingdom among others. After speaking this parable JESUS left the house of Zaccheus the publican, and continued his journey towards Jerusalem, where he proposed to celebrate the passover; and was earnestly expected by the people, who came up to purify themselves, and who began to doubt whether he would venture to come to the feast. This delay, however, was occasioned by the proclamation issued by the chief priests, promising a reward to any one who would discover the place of his retirement; *Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that if any knew where he were, he should shew it, that they might take him.* John xi, 57.

JESUS arrived at Bethany, six days before the passover, and repaired to the house of Lazarus, whom he

had raised from the dead: 'there they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of JESUS, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said JESUS, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.'

Bethany being not above two miles from Jerusalem, the news of our Lord's arrival was soon spread through the capital, and great numbers of the citizens came to see Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead, together with the great prophet who had wrought so stupendous a miracle; and many of them were convinced both of the resurrection of the former, and the divinity of the latter: but the news of their conversion, together with the reason of it, being currently reported at Jerusalem, the chief priests were soon sensible of the weight so great a miracle must have on the minds of the people, and therefore determined to put both Lazarus and JESUS to death, if possible.

Our dear Lord was not ignorant of what the chief priests and elders had determined against him, but was so far from declining to visit Jerusalem, that he even entered it in a public manner. When they 'were come to Bethpage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent JESUS two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto

you, ye shall say, the Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet, saying, tell the daughter of Sion, behold thy king cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as JESUS commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way, others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, this is JESUS, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.' Matt. xxi. 1—11.

This circumstance of our Lord has given more occasion for prophane wit and ridicule, than any before: we reckon an ass to be a contemptible creature, and a man, especially a man of character, riding upon an ass, a ridiculous figure. These are prejudices of our own times and country. And when they, who look no further than the manners and customs before them, examine this part of the sacred story by the standard of modern prejudices, they see, or think they see, something quite inconsistent with the gravity and dignity of the person, pretending to be the king of the Jews, when Christ is represented, entering in triumph into Jerusalem sitting on an ass. But however contemptible an ass, or a man riding on that creature, may be at present, it was not so from the beginning. In many countries, and particularly in Judea, persons of the highest distinction usually rode upon asses. The governors of Israel are described in the song of Deborah, as riding on white asses, Judg. v. 10. And the thirty sons of Jair, who was judge and prince over Israel twenty-two years, are said to ride on thirty asses,

ch. x. 4. And another judge is recorded to have had forty sons, and thirty nephews, that rode on seventy ass colts.—ch. xii. 14.

However it may be asked, that supposing it was an usual thing to ride on an ass, why should this common practice be mentioned in relation to the Messiah, as a mark of distinction? Might not the prophet, upon this supposition, as well have said, he shall come walking on foot? And would he not have been as well known by one character as by the other? Besides, if we turn to the book of Zachariah, where this prophecy is to be found, we shall see the person, there described, to be a king, a just king, and one having salvation: and what is there in this character, of riding on the foal of an ass, that is peculiar to a king, to a just king, and to one who was to bring salvation and deliverance to his people?

However difficult these questions may at first sight appear, they are easily answered; not by considering the state and condition of kings in general, but that peculiar to a king of Israel, on which is founded the propriety of his character.

We shall generally find, if we look into the history of the rise and fall of nations, that their prosperity and success were proportionable to their force and power, and to the conduct and ability of their leaders. But with the Jews, who from slaves in Egypt became a powerful people, the case was very different. The best and greatest of their kings, and he who carried their empire to its greatest height, has left us another account of their affairs: *The people*, says he, *got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.* Psalm xliv. 3.

We are apt to ascribe these and other similar pas-

sages, to the piety and devotion of the Psalmist; to consider them only as acknowledgments of God's general providence in the affairs of the world; and hence are apt to overlook, or not sufficiently consider the historical truths they contain. It is true, indeed, that all success, in the strictest sense, may be ascribed to God; that it is he who giveth victory unto kings; but he generally maketh use of natural means, and it is no offence to his providence that kings list their thousands of horse and foot to secure themselves and their dominions. But with the Jews it was very different: they were never so weak as when they made themselves strong; never so certainly ruined as when their force was great enough to create a confidence in themselves. For God had taken the defence of Israel upon himself: and, the people were sure to be undone whenever they took it out of his hands, to place it in their own.

God was so tender of his honour in this respect, and so concerned to justify his promise to protect Israel in the eyes of the world, that he would not always permit natural causes to interfere in their deliverance, lest the people should grow doubtful to whom they ought to ascribe their victories. And for the same reason it was, that he commanded the people to have neither horses nor chariots of war for their defence: not because they were thought useless in war; for it is well known that they were the strength of the ancient kingdoms; but because God himself had undertaken their defence, and he wanted neither horse nor foot to fight their battles.

It is evident from the Jewish history, that this law was observed for near four hundred years; namely, till about the middle of Solomon's reign. And when David swayed the sceptre of Israel, when the kingdom was carried to its utmost height, he himself rode on a mule, and provided no better equipage for his son, on the day of his coronation: *Cause Soloman, my*

son, said David, *to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon: and let Zadock the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel*, 1 Kings i. 33, 34. And when that pious prince looked back, and contemplated this state of things, he might well say, *Some trust in chariots and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.* Psalm xx. 7.

But things quickly changed their aspect in the reign of Solomon: he married the daughter of the king of Egypt, and opened a commerce between that country and his own; by which means he soon acquired an immense number of horses and chariots; and all his successors when they had it in their power, followed his example. But what did the kingdom gain by his change? They were before a rich and flourishing people, but after breaking this law of the Most High, their wealth and power gradually declined, till at last, their habitations were laid waste, their temple and cities burnt with fire, and they themselves carried captive, into a strange land.

Perhaps it may be asked, wherein the guilt of having a country full of horses consisted? There is certainly no moral crime in purchasing or keeping these creatures; but the kings of Israel were exalted to the throne, on condition that they should renounce the assistance of chariots and horses, and depend upon God for success in the day of battle.

Thus having considered this law, and the consequences that resulted from the breach of it, let us now look back to the prophecy relating to the Messiah: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion; shout O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem.* Zach. ix. 9, 10.

The descendants of Jacob were to be saved by such a king: and what sort of a king could be expected? Is it possible to imagine that God would send a king to save them who should be like the kings which had undone them? Is it not more reasonable to think, that he would resemble those who had been deliverers of their country? Kings who feared God, and therefore feared no enemy; who, though mounted on asses, and colts the foals of asses, were able to put to flight the thousands and ten thousands of chariots and horses that came against them.

The king, foretold by the prophet, was also to be just, meek, and lowly; but how could he have deserved that character, had he appeared in the pride and pomp of war, surrounded with horses and chariots, in direct opposition to the law of God? Or, as he was to bring salvation to the people, could he make use of those means which God never had prospered, and which he declared he never would?

By this it appears, that it was essential to the character of a king of Israel: who was to be just and lowly, and to bring salvation with him, that he should come riding on an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass; but if any doubt can yet remain, let the prophet himself explain it, and immediately after the description of the promised kings, adds, *and I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem;* plainly intimating, that the character given of the Messiah, that he should ride on an ass, was in opposition to the pride of their warlike kings, who had ruined themselves and their people, by their great strength in chariots and horses.

We have thus undeniably shewn the intention of the prophet, when he foretold that the Messiah should ride on an ass; and from hence it appears, that the enemies of revelation have not the least reason for turning this transaction into ridicule. Was it any reproach

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Jesus curseth the barren Fig-Tree: He driveth the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple, and healeth the diseased there: His reply to the Pharisees who took Offence at the Praises of the People: The cursed Fig-Tree is dried up: Christ *exhorteth to Faith in Prayer, and to Forgiveness of Enemies: Certain Greeks desire to see him: He sheweth the Benefit of his Death to believers; Prayeth to his Father; is answered by a Voice from Heaven; signifieth the Manner of his Death; and exhorteth to make good Use of the present Light. The Generality of the Jews believe not; yet many chief Rulers believe, but dare not confess him: He urgeth Faith in his divine Mission: He silenceth the Priests and Elders who question his Authority: He delivers the Parable of the two Sons whom their Father sent to work in his Vineyard; the Parable of the Vineyard let out to wicked Husbandmen; and the Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son, wherein is shewn the Unworthiness of those that were first bidden, that others were called in their Room, and the Punishment of one that came without having on the Wedding Garment.*

EARLY the next morning our dear Lord left Bethany, to visit again the capital of Judea: and, as he pursued his journey, he saw at a distance a fig-tree, which from its fulness of leaves promised abundance of fruit. This inviting object induced him to approach it, in expectation of finding figs; for he was hungry, and the season for gathering them was not yet arrived: but, on his coming to the tree, he found it to be really barren; upon which our blessed Lord said to it, *Let no fruit grow on thee for ever.* Matt. xxi. 19.

This transaction of our Lord, which was purely emblematical, and prefigured the speedy ruin of the

Jewish nation, on account of its unfruitfulness, under all the advantages it then enjoyed, has, by the enemies of revelation, been represented as an action unbecoming the Redeemer of mankind: but, if they had fully considered its intention, they would have been convinced, that, like the rest of his miracles, it was done with a gracious intention; namely, to awaken his countrymen from their lethargy, and prevent the total ruin of their church and nation, by repentance.

Our blessed Saviour, being disappointed in finding fruit on this fig-tree, pursued his journey to Jerusalem; and, on his arrival, went straightway to the temple, the outer court of which he found full of merchandise. A sight like this, vexed his meek and righteous soul: so that having made a small scourge of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, overturned the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and would not suffer any vessel to be carried through the temple: saying unto them, *Is it not written, my house shall be called of all nations, a house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

This is considered by St. Jerome as one of the greatest of all our Saviour's miracles, and it must be owned that the circumstances are very extraordinary, that one man should undertake so bold, and execute so hazardous a task; one man, without a commission from Cæsar, without any countenance from the Jewish rulers, without any arms, either to terrify the multitude, or defend himself; that he should cast out the whole tribe of mercenary traffickers, wrest from those worshippers of wealth their darling idol, and trample under foot their great Diana; and all this without tumult or opposition: not one of the sacrilegious rabble daring to move the hand or open the mouth.

According to tradition, a certain bright and dazzling lustre flashed from his eyes, which the people were unable to bear, as they formerly could not be-

hold the face of Moses, for the glory that surrounded him: but as the scriptures take no notice of his transcendent lustre, we must only adore the greatness of the fact, and, at the same time so improve this miracle to our spiritual advantage, as to secure by accepting his grace, the power of this mighty Reformer on our side, that when he shall come in glory, we may be safe under the shadow of his almighty wings, while he takes fearful vengeance on those who have defiled his holy temple, and made it a den of thieves; and those who have robbed omnipotence of his due, will then find their souls deprived of their everlasting rewards in the happy mansions of a blessed eternity.

The temple being thus cleared by our blessed Lord of this avaricious tribe of dealers, the people brought unto him the blind, the lame, and the diseased, who were all-healed by the Son of God; so that the very children proclaimed him to be the great Son of David, the long expected Messiah, when they saw the many miraculous cures he performed.

The Pharisees were highly provoked at these transactions, but they feared the people, and therefore only asked him, if he heard what the children said? insinuating that he ought to rebuke them, and not suffer them thus to load him with the highest praises. But JESUS, instead of giving a direct answer to their question, repeated a passage out of the eighth Psalm: *Have ye never read*, said the blessed JESUS, *out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, thou hast perfected praise?* Giving them to understand, that the meanest of God's works are so formed, as to declare the greatness of his protection; and that if the Father does not refuse the praise which arises from the least of his creatures, so the Son did not disdain that offered him by children. In the present juncture, praise was peculiarly acceptable, as it implied, that his miracles were so exceedingly illustrious, that they led the tender minds of children, illuminated only with the dawning of rea-

son, to acknowledge him for the Messiah so earnestly desired, and so long expected, by all the descendants of Jacob.

In the evening, our Lord with his disciples, left the city and retired to Bethany, were his benevolent miracle, in raising Lazarus from the dead had procured him many friends, among whom he was always in safety. The next morning, as they were returning to Jerusalem, the disciples were astonished at beholding the fig-tree that had been but the morning before declared barren, *dried up from the roots:* they had, in all probability, forgotten what our Saviour had said to this fig-tree, till its dry and withered aspect brought it again to their memory. Peter, on seeing this astonishing phenomenon, said unto JESUS, *Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away!* To which JESUS answered, that whoever had faith in the Almighty, or thoroughly believed in his miracles, should be able to do much greater things than the withering of the fig-tree: 'And JESUS answering, saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe, that those things which he seeth shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.' Mark xi. 22, 23.

He also added, that whatsoever they should ask by faith, they should receive; and concluded, by giving them directions concerning prayer, which was necessary to increase the faith he mentioned: 'And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.'

During our dear Redeemer's continuance in the temple, certain proselyted Geeks, who came up to worship at Jerusalem, desired to see him, having long cherished expectations of beholding the promised Messiah. Accordingly, they applied to Philip, a native of Bethsaida, who mentioned it to Andrew, and he, told it to JESUS. Upon which our blessed Saviour told his disciples, that he should soon be honored with the conversion of the Gentiles: *The hour is come*, said he, *that the Son of man should be glorified.* But declared, that before this glorious event happened, he must suffer death; illustrating the necessity there was of his dying, by the similitude of casting grain into the earth: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.* John xii. 24. Adding, that since it was absolutely necessary for him, their Lord and Master, to suffer the pains of death before he ascended the throne of his glory; so they, as his followers, must also expect to be persecuted and spitefully used for his name sake; but if they persevered, and even resolved to lose their lives in his service, he would reward their constancy with a crown of glory. And at the same time he tacitly insinuated, that the strangers, if their desire of conversing with him proceeded from an expectation of obtaining temporal preferments, would find themselves greatly disappointed: 'If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.'

Thus having surveyed his own sufferings, and proposed them as an example to his disciples, the melancholy prospect so greatly moved him, that he uttered in a very pathetic manner his grief, and addressed his heavenly Father for succour in his distress: *Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.*

We should learn by this example of our Lord, that prayer is the only method of easing the mind overwhelmed with distress; but at the same time, to be always resigned to the divine will: for though the weakness of human nature may shrink when persecutions or sufferings of any kind appear in all their hideous forms; yet, by reflecting on the wisdom, goodness, and power of God to deliver us, we ought to support every trial, however severe, with patience, as he doubtless proposes some happy end by these afflictions.

Our dear Redeemer, having given vent to his melancholy reflections, and made a short prayer to his heavenly Father begged of God to demonstrate the truth of his mission, by some token which could not be resisted: *Father, glorify thy name.* Nor had the great Saviour of mankind hardly uttered these words, before he was answered by an audible voice from heaven, *I have both glorified, and will glorify it again.*— The miracles thou hast already performed have glorified my name; and, by other miracles to be wrought before the sons of men, I will still continue to glorify it.

This voice was evidently preternatural, resembling thunder in loudness, but sufficiently articulate to be understoood by those who heard our blessed Saviour pray to his heavenly Father. And JESUS told his disciples, that it was not given for his sake, but to confirm them in their faith of his mission: *This voice,* said he, *came not because of me, but for your sakes.* It came to confirm what I have told you relating to my sufferings, death, resurrection, and the conversion of the whole Gentile world to the Christian religion.

A prospect like this, could not fail of being agreeable to that compassionate Being, who came down from heaven to redeem lost and undone mankind, and of removing the melancholy thoughts that afflicted his spotless soul: and, accordingly, he communicated

this comfortable reflection to his disciples, telling them that the time was at hand when the kingdom of Satan should be destroyed, and the sons of men exalted with himself into the happy regions of the heavenly Canaan: *Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

But the people on hearing our blessed Redeemer affirm, that he was to suffer death on the cross, or as he termed it, *be lifted up from the earth*, could not reconcile what he said with the prophecies made concerning the Messiah, whom they supposed was never to taste of death: *We have heard*, said they, *out of the law, that Christ abideth forever: and how sayest thou, The son of man must be lifted up?* To which our blessed Lord replied, that they should soon be deprived of his presence and miracles, and therefore they would do well to listen attentively to his precepts, firmly believe the doctrines he delivered, and wisely improve them to their eternal advantage; for otherwise they would be soon overtaken with spiritual blindness, and rendered incapable of inheriting the promises of the gospel: that while they enjoyed the benefit of his preaching and miracles, which sufficiently proved the truth of his mission from the Most High, they should believe on him, for by that means alone they could become the children of God: 'Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness, knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.

Having spoken these words to the people, our dear Lord retired privately from Jerusalem, probably to Bethany: but, notwithstanding the many miracles our great Redeemer had wrought in the presence of this perverse and stiff-necked people, the generality of them refused to own him for the Messiah; being filled

with the vain expectations of a temporal prince, who was to rule over all the kingdoms of the earth, and place his throne in Jerusalem. Some indeed, even of the rulers, believed on him, though valuing the good opinion of men above the approbation of the Almighty they thought it prudent to conceal their faith, lest they should, like the blind man, be excommunicated, or put out of the synagogue.

But our Redeemer being willing to cherish the least glimmerings of faith, wherever it appeared, soon returned to Jerusalem; and to inspire such as believed on him with courage, he cried in the temple, *He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.* As if he had said, the doctrine I preach to the children of men, is so evidently from God, that he who believeth on me, believeth more properly on the Almighty, who sent me into the world, and by whose authority alone I preach the gospel: adding, he that seeth the miracles I perform, seeth the operations of that omnipotent power by which I act; I am the Sun of Righteousness, whose beams dispel the darkness of ignorance in which the sons of men are involved, and am come to deliver all who believe on me, out of that palpable darkness. You must not however expect, that I will at present execute my judgments upon those who refuse to embrace the doctrines of the gospel; for I am not come to condemn and punish, but to save the world, and consequently to try every gentle and winning method to reclaim the wicked from the error of their ways, and turn their feet into the paths of virtue, which lead to the happy mansions of my Father's kingdom: they shall not, however escape unpunished who neglect the instructions and offers of salvation now made to them; for the doctrine I have preached, shall bear witness against them at the awful tribunal of the last day; and as it has aggravated their sin, so it shall then heighten their punishment. I well know, that the doctrines and precepts which the father hath commanded me to preach, are the only condi-

tions of eternal life; and, therefore, I have promised them with the greatest faithfulness, perspicuity, and confidence; consequently I am worthy of credit, both with regard to my mission, and the faithfulness with which I have executed the commands of the Most High.

A deputation of priests and elders was sent from the supreme council, while our Lord was thus preaching in the temple, to ask him concerning the nature of the authority by which he acted, whether it was as prophet, priest, or king, as no other person had a right to make any alterations either in church or state; and, if he laid claim to either of those characters, from whom he received it; But our blessed Saviour, instead of giving a direct answer to the question of the Pharisees, asked them another: promising, if they resolved his question, he would also answer theirs: *I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like manner will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men?* Matt. xxi. 14, 25.

The priests were reduced, by this question, to an inextricable dilemma; they considered, on the one hand that if they said it was from God, it would oblige them to acknowledge the authority of JESUS, John having more than once publicly declared him to be the Messiah; and, on the other, if they peremtorily denied the authority of John, they would be in danger of being stoned by the people, who, in general, considered him as a prophet: they therefore thought it the most eligible method to answer, that they could not tell from whence John's baptism was. Thus, by declining to answer the question asked them by JESUS, they left him at liberty to decline giving the council the satisfaction they had sent to demand: and at the same time, they plainly confessed, that they were unable to pass any sentence on John the Baptist, notwithstanding he claimed the character of a messenger from God, and they had sent to examine his pretensions. This was, in effect, to

acknowledge, that they were incapable of judging of any prophet whatsoever; well, therefore, might the blessed JESUS say, *Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.* You have no right to ask, since you have confessed you are unable to judge; and, for that reason I shall not satisfy your inquiry.

This deputation of the elders having said, that they were ignorant from whence the baptism of John was, our blessed Saviour sharply rebuked them, conveying his reproof in the parable of the two sons commanded to work in their father's vineyard; and made them condemn themselves, by asking their opinion of the two. *A certain man,* said he, *had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.* But this ungracious youth very roughly answered the kind command of his father, and, without the least preface, or appellation of respect, answered, *I will not:* but, after reflecting on the impropriety and indecency of such behaviour to this kind and indulgent father, he repented of what he had done, and went to work in the vineyard. The father having met with so harsh a reply from the former son, had recourse to the other, and in the same manner ordered him to work that day in his vineyard. This son was very different from the former, and in a very dutiful manner said, *I go Sir.* But notwithstanding this seeming obedience, he delayed to do as his father desired; he did not go to work in the vineyard. The temper and behaviour of this second son were exactly conformable to that of the Pharisees: they gave the Almighty the most honourable titles, and professed the utmost zeal for his service, in their prayers and praises; but at the same time refused to do any part of the work that he enjoined them. In the character of the other son, the disposition of the publicans and harlots is well described. They neither professed or promised to do the will of their Creator; but when they came to reflect seriously on their conduct, and the offers of mercy which were so kindly made them, they submitted to our Saviour, and amended their lives in consequence of their faith.

Our Lord having thus finished the parable, asked the Pharisees, *Whether of them twain did the will of his Father? They say unto him, the first.* They did not immediately perceive, that by this answer they condemned themselves, till our Saviour made a just application to the parable, in this sharp, but just rebuke; 'Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not,' nor entered into your father's vineyard, though like the second son, you promise in the most fair and candid manner; *but the publicans and the harlots believed him*, repented of their former disobedience, and entered into the vineyard.

Our blessed Lord did not rest satisfied with shewing the Pharisees the heinousness of their sin in rejecting the Baptist, but he thought proper also to represent the crime of the nation in rejecting all the prophets which had been sent since they became a nation, and among the rest, the only-begotten Son of the Most High; warning them, at the same time, of their danger, and the punishment that would inevitably ensue, if they continued in their rebellion. The outward economy of religion, in which they gloried, would be taken from them; their relation to God, as his people, cancelled; and the national constitution destroyed: but because these topics were extremely disagreeable, he delivered them under the veil of the following parable: *There was*, said he, *a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.*

We frequently find in the sacred scriptures, the comparison of the church to a vineyard; but this particular parable, for the fuller conviction of the Jews, is expressly taken from the fifth chapter of the prophet Isaiah, with which they could not fail of being well acquainted, nor ignorant of its meaning, as the prophet

at the end of it adds: *The vineyard of the Lord of hosts, is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but beheld oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.* Our Saviour, therefore, continued the metaphor, telling them; *That when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandman took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.* The Almighty sent the prophets to exhort the Jews to entertain just sentiments of religion, and tread the paths of virtue; but the Jews, extremely irritated at the prophets for the freedom they used in reproving their sins, persecuted and slew them with unrelenting fury. Their wickedness, however, in killing these messengers, did not instantly provoke the Almighty to pour down his vengeance upon them; he sent more prophets to exhort and reclaim them, but they met with no better fate than the former. His mercy however, still continued; and that no means might be left untried, he sent unto them his own son, whose authority, being clearly established by undeniable miracles, ought to have been acknowledged cheerfully by these wicked men: but how different were the consequences? 'When the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, this is the heir; come let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. When the Lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? they say unto him he will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their season.'

On hearing this answer made by the Pharisees, the people said, *God forbid;* surely these husbandmen will not proceed to such desperate iniquity; surely the vineyard will not thus be taken from them. But, to confirm the truth of this, our Saviour added a remarkable prophecy of himself, and of his rejection, from the 118th Psalm; *Did ye never,* said he, *read in the Scrip-*

tures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

The rejection of the Messiah by the Jews, and the reception he met with among the Gentiles, all brought to pass by the providence of God, are wonderful events: and therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

The chief priests, perceiving the drift of our Saviour's parable, were highly incensed, and would gladly have apprehended him; but they feared the people, who acknowledged him as the Messiah while they surrounded him in the temple.

But as the rulers were afraid to apprehend JESUS, he was at liberty to proceed in the offices of his ministry; accordingly he delivered another parable, wherein he described on the one hand, the bad success which the preaching of the gospel was to meet with amongst the Jews; and, on the other, the cheerful reception given it among the Gentiles. This gracious design of the Almighty, in giving the gospel to the children of men, our blessed Saviour illustrated by the behaviour of a certain king, who in honour of his son made a great feast, to which he invited many guests: The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king; which made a marriage for his son. This marriage-supper, or great feast, signifies the joys of heaven, which are properly compared to an elegant entertainment, on account of their exquisiteness and duration; and are here said to be prepared in honour of the Son of God, being bestowed on men as a reward for their obedience.

But before the supper was ready, the servants were sent forth to call the guests to the wedding; that is, when the fulness of time approached, the Jews, as being the peculiar people of God, were first called to the

great feast of heaven by John the Baptist, and afterwards by CHRIST himself; but they refused all these benevolent calls of mercy, and rejected the kind invitations of the gospel, though pressed by the preaching of the Messiah and his forerunner. After our Saviour's resurrection and ascension, the apostles were sent forth to inform the Jews, that the gospel-covenant was established; that mansions in heaven were prepared; and that nothing was wanting but their cheerful acceptance of the honour designed them: *Again, he sent forth, other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.* But these messengers were as unsuccessful as the former. The Jews undervaluing the favour offered them, mocked at the message; and some of them more rude than the rest, insulted, beat, and slew the servants, that had been sent to call them to the marriage-supper of the lamb; But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city. This branch of the parable, plainly predicted the destruction of the Jews by the Roman armies, called here the armies of the Almighty, because they were appointed by him to execute vengeance on that once favourite, but now rebellious people.

The benevolent calls of the gospel being thus rejected by the Jews, the king again sent forth his servants into the countries of the Gentiles, with orders to compel all that they met with to come unto the marriage. This was immediately done, and the wedding was furnished with guests: but when the king came into the apartment, *he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment; and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth: for many are called, but few are chosen.* Matt. xxii. 11, 12, 13, 14.

The latter part of the parable represents the final judgment, and teaches us, that though the Gentiles obeyed the call of the gospel with more alacrity than the Jews, yet they should not all be saved. And by the conclusion of the parable we learn, that the profession of the christian religion will not save a man, unless he lives in a manner conformable to its precepts. Let us, therefore, who have obeyed the call, and are by profession the people of God, think often on that awful day when the king will come in to see his guests when the Almighty will, with the greatest strictness, view every soul that lays claim to the joys of heaven: let us think of the speechless confusion that will seize such as have not on the wedding garment, and of the inexorable anxiety with which they will be consigned to weeping and gnashing of teeth; and let us remember, that to have seen for a while the light of the gospel, the fair beamings of an eternal hope, will add deeper and more sensible horrors to those gloomy caverns. On the other hand, to animate and encourage us, let us think also on the harmony, pomp, and beauty of heaven, that will add to the solemnity, the magnificence, and the joys of the happy time, when the marriage-supper of the Lamb shall be celebrated.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Our Saviour answers the insidious question of the Pharisees concerning paying tribute to Cæsar: He confuteth the Sadducees who questioned him touching the Resurrection: He sheweth which are the two great Commandments of the Law: He proposeth to the Pharisees a Question concerning himself: He exhorteth to observe the Doctrine, but not to follow the evil Example of the Scribes and Pharisees; and particularly not to imitate their ambition: He pronounceth divers Woes against the Scribes and Pharisees, for their blindness and Hypocrisy: and proposeth the Destruction of Jerusalem.

THE parable of the marriage-supper incensed the Pharisees in such a manner, that they immediately concerted with the Herodians or Sadducees, on the most proper method of putting our Lord to death. It is sufficiently evident, that their hatred was now carried to the highest pitch; because the most violent enmity which had so long subsisted between the two sects, was on this occasion suspended, and they joined together to execute this cruel determination on the Son of God: they, however, thought it most eligible to act very cautiously, and endeavour if possible, to catch some hasty expression from him, that they might render him odious to the people and procure something against him, that might serve as a basis for a prosecution. Accordingly, they sent some of their disciples to him, with orders to feign themselves just men, who maintained the greatest veneration for the divine law, and dreaded nothing more than the doing any thing inconsistent with its precepts; and, under this specious cloak of hypocrisy, to beg his determination of an affair, that had long lain heavy on their consciences; namely, the paying tribute to Cæsar, which they thought inconsistent with their zeal for religion. This question was, it seems, furiously debated in our Saviour's time; one

Judas, a native of Galilee, having inspired the people with a notion, that taxes to a foreign power were absolutely unlawful. A doctrine so pleasing to the worldly minded Jews, could not fail of friends, especially among the lower class; and therefore, must have many partizans amongst the multitude that then surrounded the Son of God. The priests, therefore imagined, that it was not in his power to decide the point, without rendering himself obnoxious to some of the parties: if he should say it was lawful to pay the taxes, they believed that the people in whose hearing the question was proposed, would be incensed against him, not only as a base pretender, who, on being attacked, publicly renounced the character of the Messiah, which he had assumed among his friends, but also as a flatterer of princes, and a betrayer of the liberties of his country; one who taught doctrines inconsistent with the known privileges of the people of God: but if he should affirm, that it was unlawful to pay tribute, they determined to inform the governor, who they hoped, would punish him as a fomenter of sedition. Highly elated with their project, they accordingly came; and, after passing an encomium on the truth of his mission, his courage, and his impartiality, they proposed this famous question; 'Master,' said they, 'we know that thou art true and carest for no man; for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth. Tell us therefore, what thinkest thou, is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or not?

However, though they had artfully laid the scheme, they could not deceive our blessed Lord, who beheld the inmost recesses of their hearts: he saw their secret intentions; and accordingly called them hypocrites, to signify, that though they made conscience, and a regard for the divine will, their pretence for proposing this question, he saw their design, and knew that their intention was only to ensnare him.

Nevertheless, our blessed Saviour did not decline answering their question, but previously desired to

see a piece of the tribute money. The piece was accordingly produced and proved to be coined by the Romans. Upon which our dear Lord answered them, since this money bears the image of Cæsar, it is his; and by making use of it, you acknowledge his authority; if so, I leave it to yourselves, to judge whether tribute ought not to be paid towards the support of that government, which ye have acknowledged, which ye cannot shake off, and by which your tranquility is preserved: but, at the same time that you discharge your duty to the civil magistrate, you should never forget the duty you owe to your God; but remember, that as you bear the image of the great, the omnipotent King, you are his subjects, and ought to pay him the tribute of yourselves, serving him to the very utmost of your power.

Under a pretence of religion, the Pharisees and their followers often justified sedition; but the Herodians, in order to ingratiate themselves with the reigning powers, made them a compliment of their consciences, complying with whatever they enjoined, however opposite their commands might be to the divine law. Our Lord therefore adapted his answer to them both, exhorting them in their regards to God and the magistrate, to give each his due; as, when their rights only are insisted on, there can be no inconsistency between them.

JESUS, by so unexpected an answer, confuted them on their own principles, and shewed that the rights of God, and those of the magistrate, do not in the least interfere; because magistrates are God's deputies, and rule by his authority: this quite disconcerted and silenced these crafty enemies; they were astonished both at his having discovered their design, and his wisdom in avoiding the snare they had so artfully laid for him; *When they heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.* Matt. xxii. 22.

But the miscarriage of this scheme did not intimidate others from renewing the attack; enemies came

against him from every quarter. The Sadducees, who denied the doctrine of a future state, together with the existence of angels and spirits, first returned to the charge; proposing to him their strongest argument against the resurrection which they deduced from the law given by Moses, with regard to marriage: *Master*, said they, *Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. There were therefore, seven brethren; and the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also; and they left no children and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife.*—Luke xx. 28—33.

But the Sadducees, believing the soul to be nothing more than a refined matter, were persuaded, that if there was any future state, it must resemble the present; and the being in that state material and mortal, the human race could not be continued, nor the individuals rendered happy without the pleasures and conveniencies of marriage: and hence considered that every man's wife should be restored to him, as a necessary consequence of the doctrine of the resurrection, or a future state.

But our blessed Saviour soon confuted this argument, by telling the Pharisees they were ignorant of the power of God, who had created spirit as well as matter, and who can render man completely happy in the enjoyment of himself. He also observed, that the nature of the life obtained in a future state, made marriage altogether superfluous, because in the world to come, men being spiritual and immortal, like the angels, there was no need of natural means to propagate or continue the kind: *Ye do err*, said our dear Lord, *not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For*

in the resurrection, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage. Matt. xxii. 29. *Neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.* Luke xx. 36. Hence we may observe, that good men are called the children of the Most High, from their inheritance at the resurrection, and particularly on account of their being adorned with immortality.

Having thus shewn their ignorance of the true nature of a future state, and the difference between corporeal and spiritual beings, our dear Lord proceeded to shew that they were also ignorant of the scriptures, and particularly of the writings of Moses, from whence they had drawn their objection: for he demonstrated, from the very law itself, the certainty of a resurrection, at least, that of just men, and consequently quite demolished the opinion of the Sadducees, who by believing the materiality of the soul, affirmed that men were annihilated at their death, and that their opinion was founded on the writings of Moses: *Now*, said our Saviour, *that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.* Luke xx. 37, 38. As if he had said, the Almighty cannot properly be called God unless he has his people, and be Lord of the living. Since, therefore, Moses called him the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, long after these venerable patriarchs were dead, the relation denoted by the word *God*, still subsisted between them: consequently they were not annihilated as you pretend, but are still in being, and continue to be the servant of the Most High. This argument was conclusive; it effectually silenced the Sadducees, and agreeably surprised the people, to see the objection, hitherto thought impregnable, totally abolished, and the sect they had long abominated, fully confuted: *And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.* Matt. xxii. 33.

Though the Pharisees had joined with the Sadducees, in order to put our blessed Saviour to death, they could not fail of being pleased to see their inveterate enemies put to silence, the famous argument they had so often proposed with ostentations, as unanswerable, fully confuted. Nor could they refrain from giving the Saviour of mankind the praise due to his superlative wisdom; for one of the Scribes desired him to give his opinion, on a question often debated among their teachers; namely, which was the great commandment of the law. The true reason for their proposing this question, was to try whether he was as well acquainted with the sacred law, and the debates that had arisen on different parts of it as he was in deriving arguments from the inspired writers to destroy the tenets of those who denied a future state.

In order to understand the question proposed to our blessed Saviour by the Scribe, it must be remembered, that some of the most learned Rabbins had declared, that the law of sacrifices was the great commandment; some, that it was the law of circumcision; and others, that the law of meats and washings had merited that title. Our blessed Saviour, however, shewed that they were all mistaken; and that the great commandment of the law is the duty of piety; and particularly mentioned that comprehensive summary of it, given by Moses, *Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first and great commandment.* Mark xiii. 29, 30.

Here I cannot help observing, that this summary of piety begins with an emphatical assertion of there being only one God, the maker of heaven and earth, and the possessor of all perfection, in order to induce us to use the utmost diligence in obeying his precepts; the first and chief of which is, to give him our hearts. The Divine Being is so transcendently amiable in him-

self, and hath by the innumerable benefits conferred upon us, such a title to our utmost affection, that no obligation bears any proportion to that of loving him. The honour assigned to this precept, proves that piety is the noblest act of the human mind, and that the chief ingredient in piety is love, founded on a clear and extensive view of the divine perfections, a permanent sense of his benefits, and a deep conviction of his being the sovereign good—our portion—our happiness: but it is essential to love, that there be a delight in contemplating the beauty of the object beloved, whether that beauty be matter of sensation or reflection; that we frequently, and with pleasure, reflect on the benefits confered on us by the object of our affections; that we have a strong desire of pleasing him, great fear of doing any thing to offend him, and a sensible joy in thinking we are beloved in return. Hence the duties of devotion, prayer and praise, are the most natural and genuine exercises of the love of God: nor is this virtue so much any single affection, as the continual bent of all the affections and powers of the soul; consequently to love God is as much as possible to direct the whole soul towards him, and to exercise all its faculties on him as its chief object. Accordingly, the love of God is described in scripture, by the several operations of the mind, *a following hard after God*, namely, by intense contemplation; a sense of his perfection, gratitude for his benefits, trust in his goodness, attachment to his service, resignation to his providence, the obeying of his commandments, admiration, hope, fear, joy, &c. not because it consists in any of those singly, but in them altogether: for to content ourselves with partial regards to the Supreme Being, is not to be affected towards him in the manner we ought to be, and which his perfections claim. Hence the words of the precept are, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength;* that is with the joint force of all thy faculties; and therefore, no idol whatsoever must partake of the love and worship that is due to him alone.

But the beauty and excellency of this state of mind is best seen in its effects; for the worship and obedience flowing from such an universal bent of the soul towards God, is as much superior to the worship and obedience arising from partial considerations, as the brightness of the sun is to any picture that can be drawn of that luminary. Thus, for example, if we look upon God, only as a stern law-giver, who can and will punish our rebellion, it may, indeed, force an awe and dread of him, and as much obedience to his law as we think will satisfy him, but can never produce that constancy in our duty, that delight in it, and that earnestness to perform it in its utmost extent, which are produced and maintained in the mind, by the sacred fire of divine love, or by the bent of the whole soul turned towards God: a frame that constitutes the highest perfection and happiness of the creature, and, therefore, the most excellent that can be conceived and the most to be desired.

We should always earnestly desire to be blessed with the presence of the Most High, our souls should pant after him, as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, and even thirst for the living God. Again, this commandment requires us to fear God; and certainly we cannot love the Lord our God, unless we fear and reverence him; for as the love, so the fear of God, is the sum of all the commandments, and indeed, the substance of all religion. If we acknowledge there is a God, it is but reasonable we should fear his essential greatness and glory; for you open a passage for a deluge of villiany and wickedness, if you take away the fear of a deity, and that of a Supreme Power, that can reward and punish the actions of men.

It is not enough that we love and fear the Most High, we must also call upon the name of God in our prayers and praises; love and fear, respect the inward worship of God in our hearts, and by this act of outward worship, we give an express testimony that we love and fear him: prayer and praises are the tribute and hom-

age of religion, by the one we acknowledge our dependance upon God, by the other we confess, that all our blessings and comforts are from him. Such, therefore as neither pray to God nor praise him, cannot be said to have a God, for they acknowledged none, but are gods to themselves; and as the love and fear of God are often used in scripture for his whole worship and service, so is this calling upon his name: '*Pour out thy fury upon the Heathen that knows thee not, and upon the families that have not called upon thy name.*—— Jer. x. 25.

But to return—Our blessed Saviour having thus answered the question put to him by the Scribe, added, that the second commandment was that which enjoined the love of our neighbour. This had, indeed, no relation to the lawyer's question concerning the first commandment; yet our blessed Lord thought proper to shew him which was the second, probably because the men of his sect did not acknowledge the importance and precedency of love to their neighbours, or because they were remarkably deficient in the practice of it, as JESUS himself had often found in their attempts to kill him: *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

Our natures must be brought to a temper that is all love and goodness, if we would become like God, who is love; and if our souls dwell in love, then we dwell in God and God in us. This principle will be also fruitful in every good work; it will make us readily perform the duties of all relations in which we stand: and because love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore it is the fulfilling of the law; for it will prompt us to a cheerful and ready performance of every office, whether of justice or charity, that we owe to our neighbour: all the best things we can do, if destitude of this principle, will appear to be either the effect of hypocrisy, or done to procure the esteem of men: without love, a narrowness of soul will shut us up within ourselves,

and make all we do to others only as a sort of merchandize, trading for our own advantage: it is love only that opens our hearts to consider other persons, and to love them on their own account, or rather on account of God, who is love.

Those who possess the effects of this excellent temper well deserve our consideration: they have a constant calm within, and are not disturbed with passion, jealousy, envy, or ill-nature: they observe and rejoice in the happiness of others, they are glad to see them easy, and share with them in their joy and felicity, not fretting or complaining, though they enjoy less than their neighbours. It is true, love has a very different effect; for the same temper will render many so considerate of the misfortunes of others, as to sympathize with them in their distress and be greatly affected with such objects of compassion as it is not in their power to assist: but there is a real pleasure even in this compassion, as it melts us into the greatest tenderness, and proves us to be men and Christians. The good man by the overflowings of his love, is sure that he is a favourite with his Maker, because he loves his neighbour: his soul, therefore dwells at ease; there is a sweetness in all his thoughts and wishes: this makes him clear in his views of things; no vapours, no clouds darken him, but an inward serenity reigns in his mind, and such a liveliness in all his thoughts, as spreads a cheerfulness in his looks, and renders him grateful to all about him.

A constant disposition for prayer, is also maintained in him who has this charitable temper: a calm mind is easily recollected; but nothing dissipates the thoughts more, and renders them less fixed and attentive than passion. A charitable man, who has had occasions to forbear and forgive others, and to return good for evil, dares, with an humble assurance to lay claim to mercy and pardon: for though he is ready to acknowledge, he is many talents indebted to his Maker; yet being of a forgiving temper, he has an argument to plead for

mercy and forgiveness, and to conclude that *much will be forgiven him because he loveth much.* There is such a likeness and sympathy between the spirit of love, and the spirit of true devotion, that they have a sensible influence upon each other, and the one will rise or fall in proportion to the other.

But to return from this digression, which we flatter ourselves has not been disagreeable to the reader, we shall go back to the Scribe who was astonished at the justness of our Saviour's decisions, and answered, that he had determined rightly since there is but one Supreme God, whom we must all adore; and if we love him as much as we are able, and without a rival, and our neighbour as ourselves, we worship him more acceptably than if we sacrifice to him all the cattle upon a thousand hills. And our Lord declared, that the person who made this reflection, was not far from the kingdom of God, and highly applauded the piety and wisdom of it.

During the course of our Saviour's ministry, the Pharisees having proposed to him many difficult questions with an intention to prove his prophetical gifts, he now, in his turn, thought proper to make a trial of their skill in the sacred writings. For this purpose, he asked their opinion of a difficulty concerning the Messiah's pedigree: *What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto him, the Son of David,* Matt. xii. 42. I know answered JESUS, you say, CHRIST is the son of David; but how can you support that opinion, or render it consistent with the words of David, who himself calls him Lord; and *how is he his son?* It seems, that the Jewish doctors did not imagine that their Messiah would be endued with any perfections greater than those that might be enjoyed by human nature; for though they called him the Son of God, they had no notion that he was God, and therefore could not pretend to solve the difficulty. The latter question however might have convinced them of their error; for if the

Messiah was only to be a secular prince as they supposed, and to rule over the men of his own time, he never could have been called *Lord*, by persons who died before he was born; far less would so mighty a prince as David, who was also his progenitor, have conferred on him that title. Since, therefore, he not only rules over the vulgar dead of former ages, but even over the kings from whom he was himself descended, and his kingdom comprehends the men of all countries and times, past, present, and to come; the doctors, if they had thought accurately upon the subject, should have expected in their Messiah a king different from all other kings whatever: besides, he is to sit at God's right-hand, *till all his enemies are made his footstool.* Numbers of CHRIST's enemies are subject to him in this life: and they who will not bow to him willingly, shall be reduced by punishment, like the rebellious subjects of other kingdoms.

He returned such clear and solid answers to the ensnaring questions of his adversaries, that they gave the people an high opinion of his wisdom; and shewed them, how far superior he was to their most renowned Rabbins, whose argument to prove their opinions, and answers to the objections which were raised against him, were in general, very weak and trifling: nay, his foes themselves, from the repeated proofs they had received from the prodigious depth of his understanding, were impressed with such an opinion of his wisdom, that they judged it impossible to entangle him in his talk. Accordingly, they left off attempting it, and troubled him no more with their insidious questions from that day.

Our blessed Saviour silenced his most virulent opposers by this means; but having mentioned the final conquest and destruction of his enemies, who were to be made his footstool, agreeable to the prediction of the royal Psalmist, he turned towards his disciples, and in the hearing of the multitude, solemnly cautioned

them to beware of the Scribes and Pharisees; insinuating thereby, who the enemies were whose destruction he had mentioned: *The Scribes and Pharisees*, said he, *sit in Moses's seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say and do not.* Matt. xxiii. 2, 3. While they teach the doctrines before delivered by Moses, observe all they say, but by no means imitate their practices; for they impose many precepts on their disciples, which they never perform themselves: *For they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men.* The difficult precepts they impose on others are never regarded by these hypocrites, and any good action they may happen to perform, is vitiated by the principle from whence it proceeds: they do it only with a view to popular applause, and not from a regard to God, far less from a love of goodness: they are proud and arrogant to excess, as is plain from their affected gravity in their clothes, from the anxiety they discover, lest they should not obtain the principal seats in the public assemblies, and from their affecting to be saluted in the streets, with the sounding titles of Rabbi and Father: 'They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.'

The proper meaning of the word Rabbi is great, and it was given to those men who had rendered themselves remarkable for the extent of their learning; it is therefore no wonder that the proud and supercilious Pharisees were so fond of a title, which gave them great authority with their disciples, and highly complimented their understandings.

But our Lord's followers were to decline this title,

because the thing signified by it belonged solely to their Master, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowlege; and because they owed no part of their knowledge to themselves, but derived it entirely from him who came down from heaven: 'But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even CHRIST; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.' Matt. xiii. 8, 9. Life, with all its blessings, comes from God, and men wholly depend upon him; all praise and thankfulness, therefore, should ultimately be referred to him; so that if any one teacheth rightly, not the teacher, but the wisdom of the Almighty is to be praised, which exerts and communicates itself by him.

The disciples of our blessed Saviour were likewise enjoined not to accept of the title of master or leader, which the Jewish doctors also courted; because in point of commision, and inspiration, they were all equal, neither had they any title to rule the consciences of men, except by virtue of the inspiration which they had received from their Master, to whom alone the prerogative of infallibility belonged: *Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.*

However, our blessed Saviour did not intend by this to insinuate, that it was sinful to call men by the stations they held in the world; he only intended to reprove the simplicity of the common people, who loaded their teachers with praises, and forgot to ascribe any thing to God; and to root out of the minds of his apostles, the Pharisaical vanity, which decked itself with honours belonging solely to the Creator of the universe. Accordingly, that he might instil into their hearts humility, to dispose them to do good offices to one another, as occasion offered, he assured them, it was the only road to true greatness: for, by assuming what did not properly belong to them, they should be despised both by God and men; whereas, they should enjoy a

high degree of the divine favour, who did not disdain to perform the meanest offices of love to their brethren.

The Scribes and Pharisees were greatly incensed at the above discourses; and, as they were pronounced in the hearing of many of that order, it is therefore no wonder that they watched every opportunity to destroy him: but this was not a time to put their bloody designs in execution; the people set too high a value on his doctrine to suffer any violence to be offered to his person; and, as this was the last sermon he was ever to preach in public, and as all his mild persuasions had hitherto proved ineffectual, it was necessary, that he should now use some severity.

He accordingly denounced in the most solemn manner dreadful woes against them, not on account of the personal injuries he had received from them, but on account of their excessive wickedness. They were public teachers of religion; and therefore should have used every method in their power to recommend its precepts to the people, and to have been themselves shining examples of every duty it enjoined: but, on the contrary, they abused every mark and character of goodness for all the purposes of villainy; and, under the cloak of a severe and sanctified aspect, they were malicious, implacable, lewd, covetous, and rapacious; in a word, instead of being reformers, they were the corrupters of the people, and consequently their wickedness deserved the greatest reproof that could be given by the great Redeemer of mankind: *Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers; therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when*

he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves. Matt. xxiii. 13, &c

You shall suffer punishment that will be terribly severe, because ye have given a wrong interpretation of the ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah, and done all that is in your power to hinder the people from repenting of their sins, and believing the gospel; because you have committed the grossest iniquities, and under the cloak of religion, have devoured the substance of widows and orphans, hoping to hide your villainies by long prayers: because ye have expressed the greatest zeal imaginable in making proselytes, not with a view to render the Gentiles more wise and virtuous, but to acquire their riches, and a command over their consciences; and instead of teaching them the precepts of virtue and the moral duties of religion, you confine their duties to superstitious and ceremonial institutions, and hence they often relapse into their old state of heathenism, and become more wicked than before their conversion, and consequently liable to a more severe sentence.

Our Lord also mentioned, in a particular manner, their doctrine concerning oaths; and declared in opposition to their abominable tenets, that every oath, if the matter of it be lawful, is obligatory; because when men swear by any part of the creation, it is an appeal to the Creator himself; for, in any other light, an oath of this kind is absolutely ridiculous, the object having neither knowledge of the fact, nor power to punish the perjury: 'Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind, whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty! Ye fools and blind, for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore

shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.'

Our blessed Saviour also upbraided them with their superstitious practices, in observing the minutest parts of the ceremonial precepts of the law; and at the same time utterly neglecting the internal and indispensable rules of righteousness: *Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tythe of mint, and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

The Son of God also took notice of their hypocrisy; for they spared no pains to appear virtuous in the eyes of the world, and maintain an external conduct that should require the praises of men; but at the same time neglected to adorn their souls with the robe of righteousness, which is the only ornament that can render them dear in the sight of their Maker; Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.' Cleanse first thy mind, thy inward man, from evil dispositions and affections, and thy outward behaviour will of course be virtuous and praise-worthy.

Our dear Lord also animadverted upon the success of their hypocrisy: they deceived the simple and unthinking part of mankind, with their pretended sanctity, appearing like whited sepulchres, beautiful on the outside, while their internal parts were full of uncleanness: 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead

men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.'

He also censured them for the pains they had taken in adorning the sepulchres of the prophet, because they pretended a great veneration for their memory, and even condemned their fathers who killed them, saying, that if they had lived in the days of their fathers, they would have opposed such monstrous wickedness, while at the same time, all their actions abundantly proved, that they still cherished the same spirit they condemned in their fathers, persecuting the messengers of the Most High, particularly his only begotten Son, whom they were determined to destroy: *Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.*

Our blessed Saviour added, that the Diving Being was desirous of trying every method for their conversion, though all these instances of mercy were slighted; and therefore, they must expect such terrible vengeance as should be a standing monument of the divine displeasure against all the murders committed by the sons of men, from the foundation of the world.

Thus having laid before them their heinous guilt and dreadful punishment; he was, at the thought of the calamities which were soon to fall upon them, exceedingly moved, and his breast filled with sensations of pity to such a degree, that unable to contain himself, he broke forth into tears, bewailing the hard lot of the city of Jerusalem; for as its inhabitants had more deeply imbrued their hands in the blood of the prophets they were to drink more deeply of the punishment due

to such crimes: *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*

This exclamation of the benevolent Redeemer of mankind, is such as can hardly be read without a tear, and conveys a strong idea of his love for that ungrateful nation. How often had the Almighty called upon them to return from their evil way, before he sent his only begotten Son into the world! How often, how emphatically, did the compassionate JESUS entreat them to embrace the merciful terms now offered them by the Almighty! And with what unconquerable obstinacy did they refuse the benevolent offers, and resist the most winning expressions of the divine love! By the word *house*, our blessed Saviour meant the temple, which was from that time to be left unto them desolate; the glory of the Lord, which Haggai had prophesied should fill the second house, now was departing from it; adding, 'I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. As if he had said, As ye have killed the prophets, and stoned them whom the Father had sent from the courts of heaven, and will shortly put me, who am the Lord of the temple, to death; your holy house shall be left desolate, and your nation totally deserted by me; nor shall you see me any more till the whole nation is converted to Christianity, when all the descendants of Jacob shall, with one voice, cry out, *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,* as the multitude lately did.

In this manner the blessed JESUS stripped the Scribes and Pharisees of their hypocritical mask. He treated them with severity, because their crimes were of the blackest dye; and hence we should learn to be really good, and not flatter ourselves that we can cover our

crimes from that piercing eye to which nothing is concealed with the cloak of hypocrisy.

At these discourses, the people could not fail of being astonished, as they had always considered their teachers as the most righteous among the sons of men; nay, the persons themselves against whom they were levelled, were confounded, because their own consciences convinced them of the truth of every thing laid to their charge. They therefore knew not what course to pursue; and they let JESUS depart without making any attempt to seize him, or inflict on him any kind of punishment, being prevented from putting their wicked purposes into practice until the work was finished for which he was sent of his Father into the world to do.

CHAPTER XXX.

CHRIST valueth the poor Widow's two Mites above all the gifts of the Rich: He foretelleth the Destruction of the Temple; sheweth what Signs and Calamities should go before, and what should happen at the Time of his Coming: He delivers the Parable of the ten Virgins; and of the Talents, which a King distributed among his Servants, to be improved by them: and in a third Parable, delivered at the same Time, he gives a Description of the last Judgment.

AFTER our dear Lord had exposed the secret practices of the Scribes and Pharisees, he repaired with his disciples unto the court of the temple, called the treasury, from several chests being fixed to the pillars of the portico surrounding the court for receiving the offerings of those who came to worship in the temple. While he continued in this court 'He beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury; for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.' Mark xii. 41, 42 43, 44.

This poor widow's offering was, in itself, very small, yet, in proportion to the goods she enjoyed, it was remarkably large; for it was all she had, even all her living. In order, therefore, to encourage charity, and shew that it is the disposition of the mind, not the magnificence of the offering, that attracted the regard of the Almighty, the Son of God applauded this poor widow, as having given more in proportion than any

of the rich. Their offerings, though great in respect of her's, were but a small part of their estates, whereas, her offering was her whole stock. And from this passage of the gospel, we should learn, that the poor, who in appearance are denied the means of doing charitable offices, are encouraged to do all they can; for how small soever the gift may be, the Almighty who beholds the heart, values it, not according to what it is in itself, but according to the disposition with which it is given. On the other hand, we should learn from hence, that it is not enough for the rich, that they exceed the poor in their gifts of charity, they should bestow in proportion to their fortune; and they would do well to remember, that a little given, where a little only is possessed, appears a much nobler offering in the sight of the Almighty, and discovers a more benevolent and humane temper of mind, than a greater sum out of the abundance of the rich.

Our Lord having declared, at the conclusion of his pathetic lamentation over Jerusalem, that the temple should not any more be favoured with his presence, till they should say, *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord:* which declaration greatly surprised his disciples; and therefore, as he was departing from that sacred structure, they desired him to observe the beauty of the building, insinuating, that they thought it strange he should intimate an intention of leaving it desolate; that so glorious a fabric, celebrated in every corner of the earth, was not to be deserted rashly; and that they should think themselves supremely happy, when he, as the Messiah, and the descendent of David, should take possession of it, and erect his throne in the midst of Jerusalem: *And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones, and what buildings are here!* The eastern wall of the temple, which fronted the Mount of Olives, whither the disciples with their master, were then retiring, was built from the bottom of the valley to a prodigious height,

with stones of an incredible bulk, firmly compacted together, and, therefore, made a very grand appearance at a distance. This eastern wall is supposed to have been the only remains of Solomon's temple, and had escaped when the Chaldeans burnt it: but this building, however costly or strange it appeared, our Saviour told them should be totally destroyed: 'Seest thou,' said he, 'these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.' Mark xiii. 2.

This venerable structure, which you behold with wonder, adorned with huge stones of amazing beauty, shall be razed to the very foundation. The disciples therefore, when they heard their Master affirm, that not so much as one of these enormous stones, which had mocked the fury of Nebuchadnezzar's army, and survived the destructive hand of time, was to be left one upon another, they perceived that the whole temple was to be demolished, but did not suspect that the sacrifices were to be taken away, and a new religion introduced, which rendered the temple unnecessary. They therefore, flattered themselves, that the fabric then standing, however glorious it might appear, was too small for the numerous worshippers who would frequent it, when all the nations of the world were subject to the Messiah's kingdom, and was, therefore, to be pulled down, in order to be erected on a more magnificent plan, suitable to the idea they had conceived of his future empire. Filled with these pleasing imaginations, they received the news with pleasure, meditating as they walked to the mountain, on the glorious things which were shortly to come to pass.

As soon as they arrived at the Mount of Olives, and their master had taken his seat on some eminence, from whence they had a prospect of the temple and part of the city, his disciples drew near, to know when the demolition of the old structure was to hap-

pen, and what were to be the signs of his coming, and of the end of the world: *And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately saying, tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?* Matt. xxiv. 3.

It is probable the disciples meant what signs should precede the erection of that extensive empire, over which they supposed the Messiah was to reign; for they still expected he would govern a secular kingdom. They therefore, connected the demolition of the temple with their Master's coming, though they had not the least notion that he was to destroy the nation; and change from the religious worship. They, therefore, meant by *the end of the world*, or, as the words should have been translated, *the end of the age*, the period of the political government then executed by Heathen procurators, and considered their Master's coming to destroy the constitution then subsisting, as a very desirable event: they also thought the demolition of the temple proper, as they expected a larger and more superb building would be erected in its stead, in proportion to the number of the Messiah's subjects.

It will sufficiently appear, that this is the real sense of the disciples question, if we consider, that they were delighted with the prospect: whereas, if they had meant by the end of the world, the final period of all things, the destruction of the temple would have exhibited to them a melancholy prospect, which they could not have beheld, without a deep concern in their present temper of mind.

Therefore, our blessed Lord was careful to convince them of their mistake, by telling them, that he was not come to rule a secular empire, as they supposed, but to punish the Jews for their perfidy and rebellion, by destroying both their temple and nation: *Take*

heed, said he, *that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many.* This caution was far from being unnecessary, because, though the disciples were to see their Master ascend into heaven, they might take occasion from the prophecy, to think that he would appear again on earth, and, therefore, be in danger of seduction by the false Christs that should arise: And when ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars, see that ye be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass; but the end is not yet. Before this nation and temple are destroyed, terrible wars will happen in the land: 'For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.'

These things are but the beginning of a long series of calamities, which shall fall upon this nation: at the same time you shall meet with hot persecutions; walk, therefore, circumspectly, and arm yourselves both with patience and fortitude, that ye may be able to perform your duty through the whole course of these persecutions: for you shall be brought before the great men of the earth for my sake: 'But when they shall lead you and deliver you up, take no thought before hand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.' Mark xiii. 11.

Our Lord told them, during this time of trouble and confusion, the perfidy of mankind shall be so great towards one another, *that brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.* The unbelieving Jews and apostate Christians, shall commit such crimes, that the very idea of them, shall excite horror in the most barbarous nations. It is, therefore, no wonder that the perfidy and wickedness of such pretended Chris-

tians, shall discourage many disciples and greatly hinder the propagation of the gospel: but he who supports his faith during these persecutions, and is not led astray by the seduction of false Christians, shall escape that terrible destruction which will overflow the land like a deluge.

My disciples shall be scattered by these persecutions and tribulations, and shall preach the gospel in all parts of the Roman empire; and then shall the period you now inquire after arrive: then shall the Almighty arise to vengeance, and consume, in his anger, this stiff-necked generation.

At the time when Jerusalem shall be surrounded with armies, Pagan armies bearing in their standards the images of their gods, the *abomination of desolation*, mentioned by the prophet Daniel; then let him who readeth the predictions of that prophet understand, that the end of the city and sanctuary, together with the ceasing of the sacrifice and oblation there predicted, is come, and, of course, the final period of the Jewish government.

Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; Luke xxi. 21. *Let him which is on the house-top, not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field, return back to take his clothes,* Matt. xxiv. 17, 18. For the Almighty will now punish this nation for its sin: these are the days of his vengeance, when all the threatenings of the prophets, especially those of Daniel, shall be inflicted on this obstinate and rebellious people.

The women who are with child, and they who have infants hanging at their breasts, shall be particularly unhappy in those days of vengeance, because they cannot flee from the impending destruction: *But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter,* when the bad-

ness of the roads, and the rigour of the season, will render speedy travelling very troublesome, if not impossible; *neither on the Sabbath-day*, when you shall think it unlawful, *for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world, to this time, no, nor ever shall be.* This is confirmed by what Josephus tells us: for he says, 'that no less than eleven hundred thousand perished in the siege.

Our dear Lord added, that except the days of tribulation should be shortened, none of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea, of whom he was then speaking, should escape destruction. And accordingly Josephus tells us, that the quarrels which raged during the siege, were so fierce and obstinate, both within the walls of Jerusalem, and without in the neighbouring country, that the whole land was one continued scene of horror and desolation, and had the siege continued much longer, the whole nation of the Jews had been totally destroyed, according to our Lord's prediction: *But*, added our blessed Saviour, *for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.* By the elect are meant, such of the Jews as had embraced the doctrines of the gospel, and those who were brought in with the fulness of the Gentiles particularly.

During this time of universal confusion, it was natural to think, that the expectations of the whole nation would be turned towards their Messiah: for if he was ever to appear, it must be then, to deliver them from impending destruction. Our blessed Saviour therefore cautioned his disciples not to listen to any pretences of that kind, as many false Christs would arise, and deceive great numbers of the people. A prediction that was fully accomplished during the terrible siege of Jerusalem by the Romans: for Josephus tells us, that many arose, pretending to be the Messiah, boasting that they would deliver the nation from all its enemies. And the multitude, always too

prone to listen to deceivers who promise temporal advantages, gave credit to those deceivers, became more obstinate in their opposition to the Romans, and thereby rendered their destruction more severe and more inevitable. And what still increased the infatuation of the people, was their performing wonderful things during the war; and accordingly Josephus calls them magicians and sorcerers. Hence we see the propriety of the caution given by the Son of God, who foretold that, *they should shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect. But take ye heed; behold, I have foretold you all things.*

But as it was likely the partizans of the false Christs would pretend that the Messiah was concealed awhile for fear of the Romans, and the weaker sort of Christians, without this warning, might have imagined, that Christ was actually returned, to deliver the nation in its extremity, and to punish their enemies, who now so cruelly oppressed them, and that he would shew himself as soon as it is proper, our blessed Saviour thought it needful to caution them against this particular: *Wherefore, if they should say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers: believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the East, and shineth even unto the West; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.* Matt. xxiv. 26, 27.

As lightning is swift and destructive, so shall the coming of the Son of man be. But he will not come personally, his servants only shall come, the Roman armies, who shall destroy this nation, as eagles devour their prey, by his command.

Thus having given them a particular account of the various circumstances which should precede the destruction of Jerusalem, he next described that catastrophe itself, in all the pomp of language and imagery

made use of by the ancient prophets, when they foretold the destruction of cities and kingdoms: *But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.*

These expressions are figurative and lofty, and signify the decaying of all the glory, excellency, and prosperity of the nation, and the introduction of universal sadness, misery, and confusion. The roaring of the sea, and the waves, may justly be considered as metaphorical, as the signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars are plainly so. And by the powers of heaven are meant the whole Jewish polity, government, laws, and religion, which were the work of heaven; these our blessed Saviour tells us, should be shaken.

As the disciples, in conformity to the repeated questions of the Pharisees during his ministry had asked what would be the signs of his coming, Our blessed Saviour told them, that after the tribulation of those days, when the sun should be darkened, and all the enemies of the Messiah should mourn, they should see the accomplishment of what Daniel foretold, by the figurative expression of *the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven*; for they should behold the signal punishments executed on the Jewish nation by the Roman armies, sent for that end by the Son of man, who shall thus gloriously demonstrate the greatness of his power, and the extent of his dominion: *Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn. And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.*

The disciples were to consider the time of their redemption, from the oppression under which they then groaned, as near at hand when these things came to pass: and that they might be certain this prophecy would not long wait for its accomplishment, he told them that the present generation should not all be laid in the chambers of the dust, before these terrible calamities should fall upon Jerusalem. Adding, that his disciples might sooner expect the dissolution of the whole frame of nature, than that one single circumstance of this prophecy should fail of its accomplishment: 'Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.'

If we take the pains to compare the prediction of our Saviour with the history Josephus wrote of the war, we cannot fail of being struck with the wisdom of CHRIST, and acknowledge that his prediction was truly divine. For as the Jewish nation was at this time in the most flourishing state, the event here told was altogether improbable. Besides, the circumstances of the destruction are very numerous, and surprisingly particular; and the whole delivered without any ambiguity. It is therefore a prophecy of such a kind as could never have been uttered by any imposter, and consequently the person who delivered it, was truly divine, and acquainted with the secret counsels of heaven.

But it has been demanded with some assurance, by the enemies to revelation, why should CHRIST order his disciples not to flee from Jerusalem, till they saw it encompassed with the Roman army, when it would then be impossible for them to make their escape? But persons, before they propose such questions, would do well to read attentively the history Josephus has given us of these terrible calamities: because they would there find a solution of that difficulty. That

historian tells us, "That Cestius Gallus, surrounded the city with his army; and at the time when he could easily have taken the city, suddenly withdrew his forces, without any apparent reason." He adds, "that as soon as the siege was raised, many eminent Jews fled from it, as from a sinking ship." In all probability, many of these were Christians, who being warned by this prophecy of their great Master, saved themselves by flight, as he had directed. Thus we see what frivolous objections are made by the free-thinkers of our age, against the truth of the sacred writings, and how easily they are answered. And I cannot help observing, that this conduct of the Roman general, so contrary to all the rules of prudence, must have been brought to pass by the providence of God, who interposed for the deliverance of the disciples in this manner.

Having given this description of the destruction of Jerusalem, our blessed Saviour enumerated a great variety of particulars that were to precede or accompany it, assuring his disciples, that it would be very unexpected, and thence urged the necessity of a watchful vigilance, lest they should be surprised, and have a share in those terrible calamities: *But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.* Matt. xxiv. 37. *Watch ye therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh; at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.* Mark xiii. 35, 36.

As men were to undergo, at the destruction of Jerusalem, nearly the same miseries, and as the passions which its approach would raise in their minds, were similar to those which will happen at the destruction of the world, and the general judgment; it was natural for our blessed Saviour, on this occasion, to put his disciples in mind of that judgment, and to exhort them to the faithful discharge of their duty, from the

consideration of the suddenness of his coming to call every individual to account after death: *Therefore, be ye also ready; for in such an hour, as ye think not, the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods.* As if he had said, you who are the ministers of religion, ought to be particularly careful to discharge the important trust committed to your care; you are the stewards to whose care the household of the church is committed; and you would do well to remember, that your example will have a great effect upon the minds of those employed under you. It is your duty to be well acquainted with the stores of the everlasting truths, and to understand how they may be applied to the best advantage: you should also be careful to know the characters of the different persons under your direction, that you may be able to give every one of them his portion of meat in due season: and if I find you thus employed at my coming, I will reward you with the joys of my kingdom, even as an earthly master bestows particular marks of respect on such servants as have been remarkably faithful in any important trust. But on the other hand, if you behave like unjust stewards, who, because their Lord delayeth his coming, abuse their fellow servants, and riot in excess; if you tyranize over the consciences of your brethren, neglect the duties of your function, and give yourselves up to sensual pleasures, I will come upon you unexpectedly, and make you dreadful examples of mine anger, by the severe punishments which I will inflict upon you: 'But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servant, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and ap-

point him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Having thus mentioned the rewards and punishments of a future state, it was easy and elegant for our Lord to pass from that subject to the consideration of the general judgment, when those rewards and punishments should be distributed in their utmost extent. This could not fail of animating his disciples to a vigorous discharge of their duty; and, by the striking representation of the last judgment here given, must greatly tend to rouse the consciences of men from their lethargy, and consider, before it be too late, *the things which belong to their peace.*

Then shall the kingdom of heaven, the gospel kingdom, in the last dispensation of it, when the kingdom of grace is going to be swallowed up in the kingdom of glory, *be likened unto ten virgins which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish; they that were foolish*, as a proof of their stupidity, took indeed their lamps, but put no oil in their vessels, while the wise, as an instance of their prudence and foresight, took both their lamps and oil in their vessels, knowing that it was uncertain when the bridegroom would arrive, and that they might, in all probability wait long for his coming. Nor were they mistaken, for the bridegroom did not come so soon as they expected: *And while he tarried they all slumbered and slept, and at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Then all these virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came: and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward*

came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us. But he answered, and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

To understand this parable aright, we must remember, that it alludes to the customs of marriages among the eastern people. It was usual with them for the bridegroom to bring his bride home in the evening, sooner or later, as circumstances might happen; and, that she might be received properly at his house, his female acquaintance, especially those of the younger sort were invited to come and wait with lamps, till some of his retinue, dispatched before the rest, informed them that he was near at hand; upon which they trimmed their lamps, went forth to welcome him and conduct him with his bride into the house, for which they were honoured as guests at the marriage feasts, and share in the festivities.

Our blessed Saviour compares the candidates for the kingdom of heaven, to ten such virgins; he mentions ten, because this was the general number appointed to wait on the bridegroom; and to these, all Christian professors may be likened, who taking the lamp of Christian profession, go forth to meet the bridegroom; that is, prepare themselves as candidates for the kingdom of heaven, and desire to be admitted into the happy mansions of immortality, with CHRIST the celestial Bridegroom.

The case of Christians is represented to us by this of the virgins, half of whom only were wise, the other half being foolish And we must remember, that there always was, and always will be, a mixture of good and bad in the church, till the great day of separation arrives. The weakness of the foolish is represented by their taking no oil in their vessels with their lamps; that is, the foolish Christians content them-

selves with the bare lamp of a profession, and never think of furnishing it with the oil of divine grace, the fruit of which is a life of holiness. Whereas, the wise, well knowing that a lamp, without the supply of oil, would be speedily extinguished; that faith, without love and holiness, will be of no consequence, take care to supply themselves with a sufficient quantity of the divine grace, and to display in their lives, the works of love and charity. While all those virgins, though differently supplied, waited the coming of the bridegroom, they all slumbered and slept; that is, all Christians, both good and bad, the sincere and the hypocrite, all lie down together in the sleep of death; and, while the bridegroom delayeth his coming, slumber in the chambers of the dust.

There is a tradition among the Jews, that CHRIST's coming to judgment will be at midnight, which agrees with that part of the parable, *at midnight there was a cry made, Go ye out to meet him.* But however this be, whether he will come at midnight, or in the morning, it will be awfully sudden and alarming; the great cry will be heard to the ends of the earth; the trumpet shall sound and the mighty archangel's voice pierce even to the bowels of the earth, and the depths of the ocean: *Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.* All that are in the graves must then awake, and come forth; and all will then begin to think how they may prepare themselves to find admittance to the marriage-supper of the Lamb: *Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.* But the foolish soon perceived their folly; their lamps were gone out, totally extinguished, and they had no oil to support the flame: in like manner, the hypocrite's hope shall perish. But the wise were in a much happier condition; they had oil in their vessels sufficient for themselves, but none to spare: for, when the foolish virgins would have procured some from them, they denied their request, fearing there would not be enough for both.

We have here a representation of nominal and sincere Christians; the former having only the bare lamp of a profession, have neglected to live agreeably to the precepts and examples of their Master, and have not been solicitous to gain the oil of divine grace, by a constant use of the means assigned; those who have been contented with a mere negative righteousness, with such a justice and honesty as heathens boasted of, to whose charge no heinous crimes can be laid, while, at the same time, no good can be spoken of, as an effect of their faith; and such will fare like the foolish virgins: while the latter, whose wise conduct and zealous endeavours to stock their lamps with divine oil, will, like the wise virgins, enter into the joy of their Lord.

Those that were foolish, going to purchase oil, missed the bridegroom, and behold *the door was shut*. They at last, however, reached the gate, and with great importunity cried, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*. But he answered, and said, *Verily, I say unto you, I know you not*. You are strangers to me; you did not attend me at my coming, and now the door is shut, and entrance forever denied; depart from me all ye workers of iniquity.

Therefore, how justly did our blessed Saviour bid us all *watch*, that we may be found ready, whenever he cometh, or commands, by the king of terrors, our attendance before his judgment-seat. Let us not refuse this kind invitation of being constantly prepared to meet the heavenly Bridegroom: let us fill our lamps with oil, that we may be ready to follow our great Master into the happy mansions of the heavenly Canaan.

However, as this duty was of the utmost importance, our blessed Saviour, to shew us more clearly the nature and use of Christian watchfulness to which he exhorts us at the conclusion of the parable of the

ten virgins, he added another wherein he represented the different characters of a faithful and slothful servant, and the difference of their future acceptance.—This parable, like the former, is intended to stir us up to a zealous preparation for the coming of our Lord, by diligence in the discharge of our duty, and by a careful improvement of our souls in holiness; and at the same time, to expose the vain pretences of hypocrites, and to demonstrate, that fair speeches, and outward form, without the power of godliness, will be of no service in the last great day of account.

The Son of man, with respect to his final coming to judge the world, may be likened unto *a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several abilities: and straightway took his journey.*

He that had received the five talents, lost no time, but went immediately on his master's departure, and traded with the same, and his increase was equal to his industry and application; he made them other five talents. He that had received two talents, did the same, and had equal success. But he that received one, very unlike the conduct of his fellow-servants, went his way, digged in the earth, and hid his Lord's money, idle useless, unemployed, and unimproved.

But after a long time, and at an hour when they did not expect it, the Lord of those servants returned, called them before him, and ordered them to give an account of their several trusts. Upon which, he that had received the five talents, as a proof of his fidelity, produced five other talents, saying, *Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them, five talents more.* His Lord, highly applauded his industry and fidelity, said unto him, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faith-*

ful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. In like manner also, he that had received two talents, declared he had gained two others: upon which he was honored with the same applause, and admitted into the same joy with his fellow-servant; their master having regard to the industry and fidelity of his servants, not to the number of the talents only, and the greatness of their increase.

Then he that had received the one talent came, and with a shameful falsehood, to excuse his vile indolence said, 'Lord, I knew thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine'. This dishonorable notion, which the servant entertained of his Lord, greatly aggravated his crime; and accordingly his Lord was wroth, and answered, 'Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gatherest where I have not strawed; thou oughtest, therefore, to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away, even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This was the parable of the talents, as delivered by our blessed Saviour; a parable, containing the measures of our duty to God, and the motives that enforce it, all delivered in the plainest and simplest allusion: but its views are so extensive and affecting, that while it instructs the meanest capacity, it engages reverence and attention from the greatest, and strikes an impression on the most improved understanding. We are to consider God as our Lord and Master, the author and

giver of every good gift, and ourselves as his servants or stewards, who, in various instances and measures, have received from his goodness, such blessings and abilities, as may fit us for the several stations and offices of life to which his providence appoints us; but then we are to observe, that these are committed to us as a trust or loan, for whose due management we are accountable to the doner. If we faithfully acquit ourselves of this probationary charge, we shall receive far greater instances of God's confidence and favour; but if we are remiss and negligent, we must expect to feel his resentment and displeasure.

A time will come, and how near it may be, none of us can tell, when our great Master will demand a particular account of every talent he hath committed to our care. This time may, indeed, be at a distance, for it is uncertain when the king of terrors will receive the awful warrant to terminate our existence here below; yet it will certainly come, and our eternal happiness or misery depends upon it; so that we should have it continually in our thoughts, and engrave it, as with the point of a diamond, on the tables of our hearts. But this is not all we are to learn from this instructive parable; the Divine author has adapted every incident of the relation, to convey some spiritual instruction. We hence learn, that Infinite Wisdom hath intrusted men with different talents, and adjusted them to the various purposes of human life. But though the gifts of men are unequal, none can with justice complain, since whatever is bestowed, be it more or less, is a favour entirely unmerited. Each then, should be thankful, and satisfied with his portion; and instead of envying the more liberal endowments of others, apply himself to the improvement of his own. And it should be attentively observed, that the difficulty of the task is in proportion to the number of talents committed to each. He who had received five, was to gain other five; and he who had received two, was to account for other two. Surely then, we have no reason to complain, if our

Master has laid on us a lighter burden, a more easy and less service than what he has on others; especially as our interest, in the favour of the Almighty, does not depend on the number of our talents, but on application in the management of them: so that the moral design of this parable is to engage our utmost attention, to improve such talents as our heavenly Father has thought proper to bestow upon us. By these talents, are principally meant, the communications and graces of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows in different measures, *dividing to every man severally as he will.* And subordinate to these, are all the means, opportunities, and abilities to exercise or improve these graces: all the advantages of station, fortune, education, and whatever may enable us to do good; for we, having received all we enjoy from God, are strictly obliged to promote the wise ends for which he bestows his favours. And here let us take a short and imperfect view of what God has done for us; he has given us reason and understanding, to discern good from evil, and consequences of things, to collect them proper rules of judgment and action. Indeed, since the fall, this faculty has been much obscured; but still it remains an universal gift of God to men; and though not equal to all, yet it is given to every man in such measure, as is sufficient for their direction. In the knowledge of our duty, and the pursuit of our happiness, God has, by the gospel, so graciously supplied the defects of reason, that the meanest understanding may know how to be happy: such assistances of divine grace attend every Christian, if he will apply to God for it, as may enable him to direct his inclinations, govern his passions, and subdue his corrupt affections. These talents, are, in some degree, common to all men; and, by the improvements of that grace which is conferred upon every one, all have sufficient to conduct them through the several stages of life, if they will use but proper diligence and application.

But regard must be had to all the means for cultivat-

ing those gifts of nature and grace, such as all opportunities of instruction, the ministry, and ordinances of religion, the reproofs and examples of good men, the occasions offered, and the abilities given for the exercise of virtue: all these are talents, or gifts of God, deposited with us, to be diligently made use of, and for which we are accountable to him. I shall, therefore, proceed to shew what duty is required from us, in the improvement of these talents. It is here supposed, that these talents are improveable, or otherwise they would be of no use or value; and, indeed, we are bound by the command of God to improve them, who has threatened to inflict severe penalties if we neglect it: and, if they are not improved, they will not continue long with us, but be lost; the finest parts and capacities, without proper culture, will make but a mean and contemptible figure. No knowledge can be preserved without use and exercise, and the same holds with regard to moral accomplishments. It requires great care and attention to form a virtuous habit, and much more to preserve it in its vigour: unless we co-operate with the goodness of God's grace, and cultivate it by use and application, its impression will gradually wear out and be lost; *The spirit of God will not always strive with man.* He gives us a stock to manage, equal to the service he expects from us; but if we are slothful and negligent, and will not apply it to the purposes for which it was given, he will recal the useless gift: *Take from him*, says he, *the talent and give it to him that hath ten talents.* Let us, therefore diligently improve every talent committed to us, because this will be required of us in the day of account; and, if not improved, will be immediately taken from us: what this improvement implies, and how we may discharge this duty, is an inquiry of the nearest concern to us. The proper improvement of all God's gifts, is the employing them, so as may best promote his glory; this is the end the Almighty has proposed in our creation, in all the powers he has endowed us with, and in all the aids of grace he has vouchsafed to us. Whatever other improve-

ments we make of them, they will not profit us, nor be admitted as any proof of our fidelity in the day of reckoning: we may cultivate our understanding by learning and study, and extend our knowledge through all the subjects of human inquiry: but if our end be only to gratify our curiosity or our vanity, we are not serving God, but ourselves; we may increase our portion of God's outward gifts, but if we only apply them to enlarge our own conveniences, we are not making the improvements our master expects: we may take pleasure in our own knowledge and fortune, rejoice in them as our portion and instruments in our present possession; but we must still remember, that in our reckoning with God, all these improvements of our capacities and abilities, will be added to our account: and the only use God will admit us to set in balance of our debt to him, is to employ them as means of increasing and multiplying our virtues, or as instruments of exercising them in the works of religion and piety.

From this parable we may learn, that the divine justice, in this scrutiny, will estimate and reward every one's fidelity in proportion to the improvements and returns they have made. An account will be demanded of every talent; nor will it be sufficient, that we have made some improvement, it must be proportioned to the number and value of our gifts. Let us therefore, live and act under serious habitual regard to that day, when our great Master shall come and reckon with us; remembering that such as have been idle, and made no use of the talent given them by the Almighty, will be *cast into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* A prospect surely sufficient to awaken such from their slumber, quicken them to an immediate and vigorous application to duty; that by a double improvement of the time yet remaining, they may redeem what their indolence has lost. But far worse, and more difficult to be retrieved is his case, who has squandered away the stock itself, suffered his

gifts to perish for want of use; or, by abusing them to the service of sin, has provoked the Almighty to take them from him.

How shall the prodigal recal the fortune he has spent and appease the anger of his Judge? The terrors of the Lord may justly terrify him; but it should not extinguish his endeavours in despair: he has lost many excellent talents, but he who gave can restore. Indeed, the most circumspect person will, in the great day of account, want much to be forgiven: and must expect his reward from the mercy of his Judge, not from the merit of his service. Let us then do all in our power to bring forth fruits, meet for repentance; for though the awful day of the Lord may be at a great distance, yet the time allotted us to prepare for it, is limited by the short space of human life: the night of death cometh, when no man can work: to-day, therefore, while it is called to-day, let us be diligent in the work of the Lord, correct our errors, and finish what is imperfect that we may obtain his approbation, and make our calling and election sure, before we go hence, and are seen of men no more.

We have endeavoured to explain the parable of the talents after this manner, and shall now return to the third parable delivered at the same time by the blessed JESUS, namely, that of the last judgment: *When the Son of man*, said he, *shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.* Matt. xxv. 31, 32, 33.

It is common in the Old Testament, to compare good men to sheep, on account of their innocence and usefulness; and wicked men to goats, for their exorbitant lusts. Our blessed Saviour, however, does not

pursue the allegory further, but describes the remaining, and indeed the greatest part of this awful scene, in terms perfectly simple; so that though the sense be profound, it is obvious. Here the judgment of all nations, Gentiles as well as Christians is exhibited; and the particulars on which these awful trials are to proceed, displayed by the great Judge himself. Here we learn, that we shall be condemned or acquitted, accordingly as we have neglected or performed works of charity; works which flow from the great principles of faith and piety, and which the very Heathens are, by the light of nature, invited to perform. But we must not understand that such works merited this favour from the Judge; for all who are acquitted at that day, shall be acquitted solely on account of the righteousness of CHRIST, the true, the only meritorious cause, as well Heathens as Christians.

Who can read the following sentence passed upon the righteous, without feeling the warmest love and gratitude to the great Author of all good; and what a noble motive to perseverance in well-doing does it afford: *Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* Good men, can at best, but consider their present state as a banishment from their native country. A state in which they are often exposed to innumerable temptations, to persecutions, to poverty, to reproach, to contempt. But the consideration that they are travelling towards the heavenly Jerusalem, a city prepared for them, when the foundations of the world were laid, will be abundantly sufficient to support their spirits, and render them *more than conquerors*. The glory laid up for them in the mansions of eternity, and which the great Judge will, at the awful day of account, confer upon them, will animate them to bear the violence of their oppressors, and even defy the malice of men and devils. Nay, they will behold with contempt the flourishing prosperity of the wicked, and look forward to that glorious and immortal crown which will be given

them by their great Redeemer. Then shall the King say unto them on the right hand, *Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.* Matt. xxv. 34, 35, 36.

Being astonished to hear the great Judge declare, that all the good offices they have ever done to their brethren in affliction, was done to him, they ask with great reverence and humility, when they performed these services? as they never saw him in want, and therefore could never assist him: *Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink! When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* This is truly astonishing! The united wisdom of men and angels could never have discovered a more proper method to convey an idea of the warmth and force of the divine benevolence to the sons of men, or offer a more forcible motive to charity, than that the Son of God himself, should from his seat of judgment, in the presence of the whole race of mankind, and all the hosts of blessed spirits from the courts of heaven, declare that all good offices done to the afflicted, are done to himself. During the time of his dwelling with human nature in this vale of tears, he suffered unspeakable injuries and afflictions; and therefore he considers all the distressed virtuous, as members of his body, loves them with the utmost tenderness, and is so greatly interested in their welfare, that he grieves when they are distressed, and rejoices when they are happy.

Perhaps in this representation of the last judgment, it may seem strange that the inquiry should solely turn on the performance of duties, without any regard to the commission of crimes. Perhaps the true reason is, that men, generally speaking, consider the neglect of duties as a matter of no great consequence, but dread the commission of crimes. And hence it happens, that while they keep themselves free from the latter, they easily find excuses for the former. And as there is not a more pernicious error with regard to religion and morality than this, the blessed JESUS thought proper to give such an account of the judgment, as should prove the most solemn caution against it. But as the inquiry turns wholly on the performance of duties, it has been asked why the offices of charity only are mentioned, and no notice taken of the duties of piety, though the Judge himself, upon another occasion, declared these to be of more importance than the duties of charity, so highly applauded in this parable? But those who ask this question would do well to remember, that charity cannot subsist separately: piety and its origin, faith, always producing charity; and charity wherever it subsists, necessarily presupposing piety.

There is such a connection between piety and charity, as it will evidently appear, if it be rightly considered, that no man can be truly benevolent and merciful without loving those dispositions: consequently, he must love benevolence in God, that is, he must love God; for piety, or the love of God, is nothing else but the regard we cherish towards God, on account of his perfections. Piety and charity being thus essentially connected together, it was abundantly sufficient to examine the conduct of men with regard to either of those graces. In the parable, the inquiry is represented as turning upon the duties of charity, perhaps, because in this branch of goodness, there is less room for self-deceit than in the other. It is common for hypocrites, by a pretended zeal in the externals of religion to make specious pretences to extraordinary piety, and at the

same time are totally deficient in charity; are covetous, unjust, rapacious, and proud, and consequently, destitute of all love for their Creator. But none can assume the appearance of charity, but by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, relieving the distressed, and performing other benevolent offices to their brethren. The works of charity may indeed, in some particular cases, flow from other principles than that of a pious and benevolent disposition, as from vanity, or even views of interest; but then it should be remembered, that a common degree of hypocrisy will hardly engage men to undertake them: they are by far too weighty duties to be sustained by those false principles, and therefore are seldom counterfeited. Consequently, we may conclude, that the love of God, reigns in perfection wherever a genuine, extensive, and permanent charity is found.

Therefore, this parable teaches us in the plainest manner, that however loud pretentions we make to piety they will stand us in no stead at the awful tribunal of the Son of God, if we are deficient in works of charity. At the same time, if we consider it in its true light, it will give us no reason to hope well of ourselves, if we are wanting in our duty to God; and will shew us, that we should not only be charitable, but grateful; also just, temperate, and blameless in all our dealings with mankind, for we should remember, that the duty we owe to the Almighty is no other than what is due from all men in all circumstances, and which it would be unjust in us to neglect. It consists in dispositions and actions, the same in kind, but different in degree, proportionate to the perfection of the object. He who loves and admires holiness, justice, and truth in men, cannot but love these perfections in God, that is, he must love God: so likewise, he that is truly grateful to an earthly benefactor, cannot be ungrateful to one from whose bounty he receives all the good things he enjoys: and since ingratitude in men is nothing more than forgetting the benefit received, and the benefactor who

conferred the favour; how can we acquit ourselves from the charge of ingratitude to God, if we forget the obligations we lie under to him, and are at no pains to return him thanks; that is, if we wholly neglect the external and internal exercises of devotion. Since therefore, the duty we owe to God is the same in kind with that we owe to man, it will undeniably follow, that true morality can never exist where piety is wanting; and that a person renders himself ridiculous, who pretends to morality, and is destitute of piety.

Thus having endeavoured to shew that justice and piety cannot subsist separately from each other, I shall now return to the remaining part of the parable, which exhibits a scene, enough to terrify the most hardened sinner. The awful judge himself has told us, that after he has passed the happy sentence on the righteous, he will pronounce the following sentence of condemnation upon the wicked; *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hugered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger and ye took me not in: naked and ye clothed me not: sick and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or a thirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.* Matt. xxv. 41—46.

Our blessed Saviour has told us, that the fire of hell was prepared for the Devil and his angels, as well as for the wicked; and that the kingdom of heaven was prepared for the righteous. Perhaps he intended to teach us, that the original design of omnipotence was to render man happy; not miserable: a state of consummate felicity was formed for the human race, at the time they were created: but the fire of hell was prepared for the Devil and his angels immediately after their fall.

And as wicked men join with devils in their sin of rebellion against the Almighty, they are doomed to share with them in their punishments; a punishment of the heaviest kind, a punishment of devils.

Our Saviour having represented the sentences that are to be passed on the righteous and the wicked, closed the parable in the following manner: *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.* An expression short indeed, but awful beyond expression! And were it fully understood, it must surely make an impression on the most hardened sinner; as it indicates, that, when the sentence is passed, the scene is closed forever, and everlasting punishment, or life eternal, must be the lot of every individual of the human race.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHRIST *again foretelleth his own Death: The Rulers conspire against him: A Woman poureth precious Ointment upon his Head: Judas covenanteth with the Council to betray his Master for thirty pieces of Silver: Peter and John sent to prepare the Passover:* CHRIST *eateth it with them, and washeth his Disciples' Feet: He comforteth them with the Promise of a heavenly Mansion: He professeth himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life: He foretelleth the Treachery of Judas, and pointeth him out to John by a Token.*

AFTER our blessed Saviour had finished the before mentioned parables, he added a short account of his own death, in order to fortify the disciples against the greatest trial they had yet met with; namely, the sufferings of their Master; *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, not on the feast-day, lest there be an uproar among the people.* Matt. xxvi.—8—5.

Our blessed Saviour, with his disciples, repaired to Bethany in the evening, and entered the house of Simon the leper, probably one who had experienced the healing efficacy of his power. But while he sat at meat, a woman who had also doubtless been an object of his mercy, poured a box of precious ointment upon his head. This action displeased the disciples, who knew their Master was not delighted with luxuries of any kind; and therefore they rebuked the woman, imagining it

would have been more acceptable to the Son of God, if the ointment had been sold, and the money distributed amongst the sons and daughters of poverty and affliction. But their benevolent Master, said, that it had pleased the Divine Providence to order, that there should always be persons in necessitous circumstances, that the virtuous might never want occasions for exercising their charity; but those who did not now testify their love to him, would never more have an opportunity of doing it, as the time of his ministry was near its period, when the king of terrors should enjoy a short triumph over his body; and therefore this woman had seasonably anointed him for his burial. And to make them sensible of their folly, in blaming the woman for this her token of love to him, he assured them, that her memory should live to the latest period of time, and that she should be highly celebrated for this action in every part of the world.

But Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, having been more forward than the rest, in condemning the woman, thought the rebuke was peculiarly directed to him. Stung with the guilt of his own conscience, he rose from table, went immediately into the city, to the high-priest's palace, where he found the whole council assembled. His passion would not suffer him to reflect on the horrid deed he was going to commit: he immediately promised to betray into their hands, his Lord and Master, for the paltry reward of thirty pieces of silver.

Thus having engaged with the rulers of Israel, to put into their hands, a person who had been long labouring for their salvation, and had often invited them in the most pathetic manner, to embrace the benevolent terms of the gospel offered by the Almighty, he sought an opportunity to betray him in the absence of the multitude. Ye monsters in the human form, how could you plot so detestable a crime? Surely you have forgot how mercy, with her charming voice, spake in

all he uttered! How did benevolence pour her choicest stores in all his actions! Ye rulers of Israel, did ever compassion look so amiably soft, as in those melting tears which swelled his eyes, and poured down his cheeks, to soften your hard and stony hearts? Was it possible for patience to assume a form so lovely, as that sweetly winning conduct, that endured the contradiction of sinners; which besought the guilty not to die, and entreated the obstinate to be reconciled.

The apostate Judas was thus bargaining with the chief priests and elders to betray his Master, while the benevolent JESUS was preparing to celebrate the passover before he suffered with his disciples, He was now going to finish the mighty work for which he came into the world; and therefore, would not neglect to fulfil the smallest part of the law of Moses. He therefore, sent two of his disciples into the city, to prepare a lamp, and make it ready for eating the passover; telling them that they should meet a man, bearing a pitcher of water, who would conduct them to his house, and shew them a large upper room furnished, where they were to make ready for him. He was willing, in this last transaction, to convince his disciples, that he knew every thing which should befal him, that his sufferings were all premeditated by the Almighty; and that they were all submitted unto voluntarily on his own account.

As soon as night approached, JESUS left Bethany; and every thing being ready for him, at the time he entered into the city, he sat down at the appointed hour. But knowing that his sufferings was now near, he told his disciples in the most affectionate manner, that he had greatly longed to eat the passover with them before he suffered, in order to shew them the strongest proofs of his love. These proofs were to give them a pattern of humility and charity, by washing their feet: instructing them in the nature of his death, as a propiatory sacrifice; instituting the sacrament in commemo-

ration of his sufferings; comforting them by the tender discourses recorded in John xiv, xv, xvi. in which he gave them a variety of excellent directions, together with many gracious promises, and recommending them to the kind protection of his heavenly Father: *With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.* Luke xxii. 15, 16.

After our Lord had thus spoken, he arose from the table, laid aside his garments like a servant, and, with all the circumstances of an humble minister, washed the feet of his disciples without distinction, though one of them, Judas Iscariot, was a monster of impiety, that they might at once behold a conjunction of charity and humility, of self-denial and indifference, represented by a person glorious beyond expression, in their great Lord and Master. He chose to wash their feet rather than their head, that he might have an opportunity of displaying a more humble posture, and a more striking instance of his charity. The omnipotent Son of the Father lays every thing aside, that he may serve his followers; heaven stoops to earth, one abyss calls upon another; and the miseries of man, which were almost infinite, are exceeded by a mercy equal to the immensity of the Almighty. He deferred this ceremony, which was a customary civility paid to honourable strangers, at the beginning of their feasts, that it might be preparatory to the second, which he intended should be a feast to the whole world, when all the followers of the blessed JESUS should have an opportunity of feeding on his flesh, and drinking his blood in a spiritual manner.

Peter modestly declined it when our blessed Saviour came unto him; but his Master told him, that if he refused to submit implicitly to all his orders, he could have no part with him. On which Peter cried out, *Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.*

But JESUS told him, that the person who had bathed himself, had no reason to wash any part of his body except his feet, which he might have dirtied by walking from the bath. In order to teach us, that persons converted do not stand in need of a total change of mind, but only to cleanse themselves from the particular sins they constantly commit through infirmity; for it is abundantly evident that our blessed Saviour spake of a spiritual washing, because he added, *ye are clean, but not all.* Ye are men of virtuous and holy dispositions; but not all: I well know that one of you will betray me.

After our blessed Saviour had finished this menial service, he asked his disciples if they knew the meaning of what he had done, as the action was purely emblematical? You truly, added he, style me Master and Lord, for I am the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world: but if I, your Master and your Lord, have condescended to wash your feet, you surely ought to perform, with the utmost pleasure, the humblest offices of charity to one another. I have set you a pattern of humility, and I recommend it to you.

Certainly nothing can more effectually shew us the necessity of this heavenly temper of mind, than its being recommended to us by so great an example: a recommendation, which, in the present circumstances, was particularly seasonable; for the disciples having heard their great Master declare, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, their minds were filled with ambitious thoughts. Upon which our blessed Saviour added, 'Ye need not be ashamed to follow my example in this particular; for no servant can think it beneath him, to condescend to perform those actions his Lord has done before him: and therefore, if he knows his duty, he will be happy if he practises it.' Our blessed Saviour added, that though he had called them to the apostleship, and well knew the secret dispositions of every heart, before he chose them, they need not be

surprised that any one among them should prove a traitor, as it was done, that the scripture might be fulfilled: *He that eateth bread with me, hath lifted up his heel against me.* John xiii. 18.

Our dear Lord being now to be but a short time with his disciples, thought proper to take his farewel of them which he did in the most affectionate manner, These melancholy tidings greatly troubled them. They were very unwilling to part with so kind a friend, so dear a master, so wise a guide, and so profitable a teacher; especially as they thought they should be left in a forlorn condition, a poor and helpless prey to the rage and hatred of a blind and malicious generation. They seemed willing to die with their Lord, if that might be accepted; *Why cannot I follow thee? I will lay down my life for thy sake*, was the language of one, and even all of them: but the thoughts of a disconsolate separation they could not support.

Their dear Lord and Master seeing them thus dejected, endeavoured to cheer their drooping spirits; *Let not your hearts be troubled.* Listen attentively to what I am going to deliver for your consolation: *I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also.* A reviving admonition! They were one day to meet again their dear, their affectionate Master, in a place where they should live together to all eternity. But death makes so vast a distance between friends, and the disciples then knew so little of a future state, that they seemed to doubt whether they should ever after parting, meet their great Redeemer. They neither knew the place where he was going, nor the way that lead to his kingdom. *Lord*, said they, *we know not whither thou goest? and how can we know the way?* In answer to this question, he told them, that he was *the way, the truth, and the life;* as if he had said, the only way of following me to the regions of happiness, is by duly observing

my doctrines and precepts which I have delivered to you from the Almighty. He added, that by his removing to heaven, he would there intercede for them with his heavenly Father, and send the Holy Ghost to comfort them from thence.

However, lest all these arguments should not be sufficient to quiet their minds, he had still another, which could not fail of success: *If ye loved me* says he, *ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father;* intimating that he would consider it as a proof of their love to him, if they ceased to mourn. They doubtless thought, that by grieving for his death, they expressed their love for their Master; and it should seem strange, that our Saviour should put so contrary an interpretation on their friendly sorrow, or require so unnatural a thing of them, as to rejoice at his departure. What! (might they think) shall we rejoice at so amiable a friend's removal from us; or can we be glad that he retires and leaves us in this vale of misery? No, it is impossible? the human heart, on so melancholy an occasion, has no disposition to rejoice. Our blessed Saviour, therefore, adds this reason to solve the seeming paradox, because he was going to the Father; that is, he was going to ascend to the right hand of infinite power, from whence he would send them all the assistance they could desire. It must not, however, be supposed, that our Saviour meant by these words, that his disciples should not be concerned at his death, or that that they could not love him unless they expressed a visible joy on this occasion: that would, indeed, have been a hard interpretation of their grief; he well knew their grief flowed from love, and that if their love had not been strong, their sorrow had been much less. Indeed, their Master was fully convinced that love was the occasion of their sorrow; and, for that reason, he used these arguments to mitigate it.

Our Lord did not intend to initmate, that all sorrow for so worthy a friend, was unlawful, or an unbecoming

expression of their love; doubtless, he was not displeased to see his disciples so tenderly affected at his removal from them: he who shed tears at the grave of Lazarus, blended with sighs and groans, cannot be thought to forbid them wholly at his own; he, therefore, did not chide his disciples with angry reproaches, as though they had been entirely in the wrong, but gently reasoned with them by kind persuasion, *Let not your heart be troubled*, as rather pitying than condemning their sorrow. Soon after JESUS had spoken these things, his heart was greatly troubled, to think that one of his disciples should prove his enemy: he complained of it at the table, declaring that one of them should betray him. This moving declaration greatly affected the disciples, and they began every one of them to say to their Master, *Lord is it I?* But JESUS giving them no decisive answer, John, the beloved disciple, whose sweet disposition and other amiable qualities, is perpetuated in the peculiar love his great Master bore him, and was now reclining on his bosom, asked him, who among the disciples could be guilty of so detestable a crime? JESUS told him, that the person to whom he should give the sop when he had dipped it, was he who should betray him; accordingly as soon as he had dipped the sop in the dish, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, saying to him at the same time, *That thou doest, do quickly.*

Judas received the sop, without knowing any thing of what his Master had told the beloved disciple, nor did any of the disciples, except St. John, entertain the least suspicion that Judas was the person who would betray their Master. They were, indeed, so deeply affected with his declaration, that one of them should betray him, that they did not remark the words of JESUS to his apostate disciple; but continued to ask him who was the person that should be guilty of so unnatural a crime? Willing at last, to satisfy their importunity, the blessed JESUS declared that the person who dipped his hand with him in the dish, should betray

him. This, to the eleven, was a joyful declaration, but confounding in the highest degree, to Judas; impudent as he was, it struck him speechless, displaying the foulness of his heart, and pointing him out plainly.

Judas continued mute with confusion, while the blessed JESUS declared that his death should be brought about according to the decrees of heaven, though that would not in the least mitigate the crime of the person who betrayed him; adding, *it had been good for that man if he had not been born.* Judas having now recovered himself a little, asserted his innocence, by a question which implied a negation of the charge. But his Master positively affirming that he was the person, he was soon silenced.

Judas Iscariot's treachery in betraying his Master, must raise the astonishment of every reader, who has any notion of the character of our great, our merciful Redeemer. It will not therefore, we hope, be disagreeable to the reader, to explain the motives that induced him to be guilty of this attrocious crime, and consider particularly the circumstances that attended so inhuman an action. Some are of opinion, that he was induced to commit this villainy by the resentment of the rebuke given him by his Master, for blaming the woman who came with the precious ointment, and anointed the head of JESUS, as he sat at meat in the house of Simon the leper—but though this had doubtless its weight with the traitor: yet it could not, I think, be the only motive, because the rebuke was given in general to all the disciples, who had, perhaps, been equally forward with him in censuring the woman; nor can we imagine, even if he had been rebuked alone, that so mild a reproof could provoke any person, however wicked, to the horrid act of murdering his friend, much less Judas, whose covetous disposition, must have disposed him to bear every thing from his Master, from whom he expected the highest preferment when he openly declared himself the Messiah, and took the

reins of government into his own hands. If it should be answered, that his resentment was so great as to hinder him from exercising his reason, I desire it may be remembered, that though he actually agreed with the chief priests, a few hours after the rebuke was given, yet he did not commit the heinous crime till two days after.

There are others that think Judas betrayed his Master through covetousness; but if we understand by covetousness, the reward given by the priests, this opinion is equally defective; for the sum was too small for the most covetous wretch to think equivalent to the life of a friend, especially when he expected from him the highest posts and advantages. The reader will be convinced of the force of this remark, when he remembers, that all the disciples believed the Messiah's kingdom was instantly to be erected; and that according to the notion they entertained of it, each of them, especially the apostles, expected, in a very short time, to be possessed of immense riches; besides the scripture tells us, that the predominate passion of Judas was covetousness; he therefore, could not be so inconsistent with himself, as when just on the point of receiving an immense reward for his service, to exchange every thing for so trifling a sum.

But there are others that attribute the perfidy of Judas, to his doubting whether his Master was the Messiah, and that he betrayed him in a fit of despair: but of all the solutions, this is the worst founded; for, if Judas believed his Master to be an impostor, he must have observed something in his behaviour, which led him to form such an opinion of him, and, in that case, he would doubtless, have mentioned it to the chief priests and elders, when he made the contract with them, which it is plain he did not, as they would have reminded him of it, when he came back and expressed his remorse for what he had done. It should also be observed, that had Judas given them any intimations

of this kind, they would doubtless have urged them against our blessed Saviour himself, in the course of his trial, when they were at so great a loss for witnesses to support their accusations; and against the apostles afterwards, when they reproved them for speaking in the name of JESUS: besides, had Judas thought his Master an impostor, and proposed nothing by his treachery, but the price he put upon his life, how came he to sell him for such a trifle, when he well knew, that the chief priests and rulers would have given him any sum, rather than not have gotten him into their hands? In fine, the supposition that Judas believed his Master to be an impostor, is directly confuted by the solemn declaration he made to the priests, when he declared the deepest conviction of the innocence of our great Redeemer. *I have sinned*, says he, *in betraying the innocent blood.* And it must be remembered, that the remorse he felt for his crime, was too bitter to be endured; so that he fled even to the king of terrors for relief, after he saw his Master condemned.

However, since the treachery of Judas did not proceed from any of these motives, it may be asked, what other motive can be assigned for his conduct? The evangelist St. John tells us, that he was of so covetous a disposition, as to steal money out of our Lord's bag; and hence we have sufficient reason to believe, that he first followed JESUS, with a view of obtaining riches, and other temporal advantages, which he expected the Messiah's friends would enjoy: it likewise authorizes us to think, that as he had hitherto reaped none of these advantages, he might grow impatient under the delay, and the rather, as JESUS had lately discouraged all ambitious views amongst his disciples, and neglected to embrace the opportunity of erecting his kingdom, which was offered him by the multitude who accompanied him into Jerusalem with shouts, and crying, *Hosanna to the Son of David.* His impatience, therefore becoming excessive, inspired him with the thought of delivering his

Master into the hands of the council, firmly persuaded, that he would then be obliged to assume the dignity of the Messiah, and consequently able to reward his followers: for, as this court was composed of the chief priests, elders and scribes, that is, the principal persons of the sacerdotal order, the representatives of the great families, and the doctors of the law; the traitor did not doubt, that his Master, when brought before so august an assembly, would assert his pretentions to the title of the Messiah, prove his claim to their full conviction, gain them over to his interest, and immediately enter on his regal dignity. And though he must be sensible that the measures he took to compass this intention, were very offensive to his Master; yet he might think the success of it would procure his pardon from so compassionate a Master, and even recommend him to favour. In the mean time, his project, however plausible it might appear to one of his turn, was far from being free from difficulty; and therefore while he revolved it in his own mind, many things might occur to stagger his resolution. At length, thinking himself affronted by the rebuke of JESUS, at the time when the woman anointed the head of his Master, he was provoked to execute the resolution he had formed of obliging him to alter his measures. Rising, therefore, directly from the table, he went immediately into the city, to the palace of the high priest, where he found the council assembled, consulting how they might take JESUS by subtilty, in the absence of the multitude. To them he made known his intention of delivering his Master into their hands; and undertook, for a small sum of money, to conduct a band of armed men to the place where the Saviour of the world usually spent the night with his disciples, where they might apprehend him without the least danger of tumult. Thus the great deceiver of mankind tempted him to commit the horrid action, by laying hold of the various passions that now agitated the traitor's breast.

It may be gathered from the nature of the contract,

that these were really the motives which induced Judas to betray his Master; *What will ye give me*, said he, *and I will deliver him unto you?* He did not mean that he would deliver him up to be put to death; for though the priests had consulted among themselves, how they might destroy JESUS, they had not been so abominably wicked as to declare their intention publicly: they only proposed to bring him to trial for assuming the character of the Messiah, and to treat him as it should appear he deserved. The offer, therefore, which Judas made them of delivering him up, was in conformity to their public resolutions; nor did they understand it in any other light: for, had the priests thought that his design in this was to get his Master punished with death they must also have thought he believed him to be an impostor; in which case, they would doubtless have produced him as one of their principal evidences, no person being more proper to bear witness against any criminal than his companion. Or, supposing Judas repented before the trial came on, and had withdrawn himself, the priests might have argued with great plausibility, both in their own court, and before the governor, that for a man's disciple to require the judges to bring him to condign punishment, branded him with such a suspicion of guilt, as was almost equal to a full proof: also, when Judas returned to them with the money, declaring that he had sinned in betraying the innocent blood, instead of replying, *What is that to us, see thou to that?* it was the most natural thing in the world to have upbraided him with the stain he had put upon his Master's character, by the contract they had made with him. It is true, they called the money they gave him, *the price of blood;* but they did not mean this in the strictest sense, as they had neither hired Judas to assassinate his Master, nor can they be supposed to have charged themselves with the guilt of murdering him: it was only the price of blood in consequence of its being the reward they had given to the traitor for putting it in their power to take away the life of CHRIST under the colour and form of public justice; nay, it

may be even doubted, whether Judas asked the money as a reward of his service: he covetously, indeed, kept it, and the priests, for that reason, called it the price of blood.

Judas, in short, knew that the rulers could not take away the life of any person whatsoever, the Romans having deprived them of that power; and, therefore, could have no design of this kind in delivering him up; not to mention that it was a common opinion among the Jews, that the Messiah could never die, an opinion which Judas might easily embrace, having seen his Master raise several persons, and among the rest, one who had been in the grave no less than four days.

It is probable that the traitor's intention in betraying his Master, was that mentioned above, from his hanging himself when he found him condemned, not by the governor, but by the council, whose prerogative it was, to judge prophets. Had Judas proposed to take away the life of his Master, the sentence of condemnation passed upon him, instead of filling him with despair, must have gratified him, being the accomplishment of his project: whereas, this circumstance is shewn to have been perfectly natural, by the light wherein we have endeavoured to place his conduct.

Having been witness to the greatest part of our Lord's miracles, and having experienced the certain truth of them, in the powers that had been conferred upon himself, Judas could never think that the council would have condemned him as an impostor, far less, as a blasphemer; he knew him to be perfectly innocent, and expected that he would have wrought such miracles before the council, as should have constrained them to believe: therefore, when he found nothing of this kind was done, and that the priests had passed the sentence of condemnation upon him, and were carrying him to the governor to get it executed, he repented of his rash and covetous project, came to the chief priests

and elders, the persons to whom he had betrayed him, offered them their money again, and solemnly declared the deepest conviction of his Master's innocence, hoping that they would have desisted from the prosecution; but they were obstinate, and would not relent: upon which his remorse arose to such a pitch, that, unable to support the torments of his conscience, he went and hanged himself. Thus I think it probable, that the traitor's intention in delivering up his Master, was not to get him punished with death, but only to lay him under a necessity of proving his pretensions before the grandees, whom he had hitherto shunned; thinking that the whole nation would immediately have submitted, and the disciples have been raised forthwith to the summit of their expectations, if they had yielded.

But this account of Judas's conduct, is by no means calculated to lessen the foulness of his crime, which was the blackest imaginable: for, even in the light above mentioned, it implied both an insatiable avarice, and a wilful opposition to the counsels of Providence, and rendered the actor of it a disgrace to human nature: but it is calculated to set the credibility of the traitor's action in a proper light, and to shew that he was not moved to it by any thing suspicious in the character of his Master; because, according to this view of it, his perfidy, instead of implying that he entertained suspicions of his Master's integrity, plainly proved that he had the fullest conviction of his being the Messiah: and to say the truth, it was not possible for any one intimately acquainted with our Lord, as Judas was, to judge otherwise of him; having seen his miracles, which were great and true beyond exception, and having experienced his power, in the ability of working miracles, which he had received from him, and, no doubt exercised with extraordinary pleasure, together with the rest of the apostles.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Our Saviour institutes the Sacrament of his Supper: He checketh the ambitious strife of his disciples, and promiseth them a share in his Kingdom: He telleth Peter of Satan's desire to sift him, but that his faith should be supported; and yet he should thrice deny him: He adviseth his Disciples to provide Necessaries, and to arm themselves against the Day of Trial: He promiseth them Power to do greater works than his own, and the Grant of all that they should ask in his name: He requireth their Obedience as a proof of their Love, and giveth them a Promise of the Comforter, the Holy Ghost. Under the Parable of the Vine, CHRIST *setteth forth God's Government of his Church, and exhorteth his Disciples to abide in his Faith and Doctrine: He commandeth them to love one another, according to the great Love he had shown for them; and warneth them of their Sufferings for his Sake: He comforteth them by a promise of the Holy Ghost: He intimateth his Death, Resurrection, and Ascension: His Disciples confess their faith in him; he foretelleth their Desertion of him, and promiseth them Peace in him amidst their Tribulation in the World: He prayeth to his Father to glorify him: and to preserve his Apostles in Unity of Faith, and from all Evil; and to sanctify them with the Word of Truth; and for the perfect Union of all Believers, and their Admission to a Share of his Glory in Heaven.*

IT does not appear that our Saviour was in the least disturbed at the consideration of the treachery of Judas; for, in order to render his love to mankind more effectual, he instituted the sacrament of his supper, to perpetuate the memory of it throughout all ages. Accordingly, as they were eating the paschal supper, *Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body,*

which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me, observe this rite no longer in remembrance of your deliverance from Egypt, but in remembrance of me; who by dying, for you, will bring you out of the spiritual bondage, a bondage far worse than the Egyptian, under which your fathers groaned, and will establish you in the glorious liberty of the children of God: do it in remembrance of me, who, by laying down my life, will ransom you from sin, from death, from hell, and, that you may enter immortality in triumph, will set open the gates of heaven to you.

After having given the bread to his disciples, he also took the cup and gave it to them, saying, *Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* All of you, and all of my disciples, in all ages, must drink of this cup, because it represents my blood shed for the remission of the sins of mankind; my blood, by which the new covenant between God and man is ratified: it is therefore my blood of the new covenant, so that this institution exhibits to your joyful meditation, the grand basis of the hopes of the children of men, and perpetuates the memory of it to the end of the world. He added, *I will not drink hence forth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.* Matt. xxiv. 29.

The most illustrious, the most momentous event that is possible to engage the meditations of mankind, is the manifestation of the Son of God: to his life and death, his resurrection and ascension into glory, we are indebted for our hopes and assurances of pardon, for our peace, for our happiness: to procure our benefit, he made the most amazing condescension from the dignity he enjoyed with his Father, by putting on the veil of flesh; he poured divine instruction from his lips, and shone forth with an all-perfect and all-lovely example: for our benefit, he submitted to a course of the most cruel treatment of his bitter ene-

mies, to the agonies of the cross and to the stroke of the king of terrors: for our benefit, he arose again with power and lustre, ascended into the mansions of eternal happiness, intercedes for us with the Almighty, and holdeth the reins of government. And shall the amiable, the excellent, the beneficial actions of this Saviour, be buried in oblivion? Forbid it gratitude, duty, interest! Forbid it, every consideration that can affect the human mind! With the greatest wisdom and goodness this beneficent JESUS instituted a rite that should recal his love to our memories, and awake each pious passion in our breasts; a rite which, by the breaking of bread, and the pouring out of wine should represent to us, in a striking manner, that most signal proof of the affection, both of him and his heavenly Father, when his tender frame was exposed to wounds and bruises, when streams of the most precious blood issued from his sacred veins. And the more we reflect on this instance of divine love, the more we shall perceive that there was a peculiar propriety in pointing out, by a particular ordinance, a fact of such immense importance in the system of revelation! Nay, we may even venture to assert, that in some dark and corrupt ages, when the Scriptures were little known by the common people, and hardly studied by the priests, the death of our Saviour, had not the remembrance of it been renewed by the celebration of this sacred ordinance, would have been almost forgotten.

We should also remember, that the vanities of the world, the allurements of sensual pleasure, the charms of ambition, the splendour of riches; in short, temptations from present objects of every kind, have often too fatal an influence on our temper and conduct; they have a melancholy aptitude to draw the soul aside to folly, and to obliterate the impressions of things divine. It was, therefore, a wise, a kind intention of our great Redeemer, by a frequent repetition of the sacramental feast to call back the wandering heart of man to a sense of his duty and obligations as a Chris-

tian. Besides, though the religion of the immuculate JESUS is altogether gentle, generous, and beneficent; though its whole tendency is to correct the passions, sweeten the dispositions, and enlarge the affection of men; and though it enforces all this upon us by motives surprisingly powerful and affecting; yet such is the perverseness of the human heart, that jealousies and contentions, envy, wrath, and malice, too often find admittance there. Was it not then an instance of our Saviour's wisdom and benevolence, by uniting us together at the sacrament of his body and blood to inspire us with condescension, compassion, and love, and to urge the putting away all bitterness, anger, evil-speaking, and revenge.

We ought, therefore, to be very careful how we perform this duty appointed by our dying Saviour? We should, in order to receive it worthily, employ our meditation on the design and excellency of the gospel; on the noble system of doctrines and duties it contains; on the illustrious, divine, and complete example of the blessed JESUS; on the important privileges, the valuable promises, and the ravishing prospects his revelation affords; and on the bright and convincing evidence with which it is attended. We should contemplate that essential and unparalleled benevolence of the Deity, in forming the way for our redemption, on the readiness manifested by the Son of God, in undertaking our cause; and on his wonderful transactions in the prosecution of this grand, this amazing work: above all, we should impress upon our souls a strong sense of the special and immediate purposes for which this sacrament was appointed, and when we actually join in communion, we should be careful that our affections be properly directed, and warmly engaged.

To have our hearts fixed upon the vanities, the profits, and the cares of this world, is a direct violation of the ordinance; and therefore we should be extreme

ly careful to maintain a right temper and behaviour at that time. We should study to abstract our thoughts as much as possible, from every foreign, every terrestrial consideration, and to have our passion fervently employed in the solemn service. 'Retire, O my soul,' each of us should say, 'from this inferior scene of things, from all its pleasures and all its pursuits, and hold communion with the Almighty and his Son, the immaculate JESUS. Meditate upon that infinite grace of omnipotence, which contrived the amazing plan, that displayeth pardon, peace, and endless happiness to so undeserving a creature as thou art. Recollect that surprising condescension and tenderness of thy compassionate Redeemer, which induced him to bring down from heaven, salvation to the sons of men. Call to mind the admirable instructions he offered, the charming pattern he exhibited, the hard labours and sufferings he endured in the course of his ministry; especially call to mind the ignominy, the reproaches, the agonies he endured when he hung upon the cross, and purchased for thee eternal mercy. Think upon these affecting subjects, till thine heart is filled with sorrow for thine iniquities; till thy faith becomes lively, active, and fruitful; till thy gratitude and love are elevated to the highest pitch; till thy obedience is rendered uniform, steady and complete. Hast thou, O my God, and Parent of universal nature! Hast thou so illustriously manifested thy compassion for sinners, as not to spare thine own Son? Hast thou sent the Saviour into this lower world, in order to raise the children of men to immortality, perfection, and glory? And am I now in thy presence, on purpose to celebrate this institution, which requireth me to commemorate the death of the great Messiah; to declare my public acceptance of his excellent revelation, and my regard to my Christian brethren? May then the remembrance of his beneficence, dwell upon my mind, and upon my tongue for ever and ever! May I consider and comply with the intention of his gospel; and may the sentiments of kindness and charity

towards my fellow-mortals, and fellow-disciples, with increasing purity, with increasing zeal, reign in my breast.'

When we partake of this sacred ordinance, such are the views that should possess our souls: but it will signify little to entertain these views at that time, unless the effects of them are apparent in our future conduct and conversation; for a transient flow of affections, or sallies of immediate delight, were not principally intended in this institution. The blessed JESUS did not ordain it as a ceremony or charm, but as a proper method of establishing our hearts in virtuous and pious dispositions. Though ye have, therefore, O Christians, obeyed the Redeemer's command in this appointment, and found your passions greatly moved, yet this is not the whole required at your hands; it will justly be expected, that ye should live to the honor of your divine Master. As you have solemnly professed your faith in him, and your love towards him, the reality of your faith and love should be demonstrated by walking more strictly in the way of his precepts, and by abounding in that heavenly character and temper, which his spotless example so engagingly recommends: thus only will the sacrament become subservient to the most beneficial purposes; thus only will it be instrumental in qualifying us for sharing in the dignity and felicity possessed by our exalted Saviour. May, therefore, all the followers of the immaculate JESUS, advance from holiness to holiness till they arrive at the regions of eternal felicity, by uniting together at his sacred table.

Having thus instituted his last supper, our blessed Saviour was deeply affected with his own thoughts: and after delivering the sacramental cup, telling them that his blood was shed for them, he mentioned the treachery of Judas a second time: *But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me, is with me on the table.* This second declaration was made very properly after

the institution of the sacrament, which exhibits the highest instance of our great Redeemer's love to mankind, his dying to obtain the remission of their sins; for it abundantly proves, that the person who could deliberately be guilty of such an injury to so kind a friend, must have been a monster, the foulness of whose ingratitude, cannot be reached by the force of language. Some of the disciples, particularly struck with horror at the thought of Judas's treachery, rebuked him, by asking him with surprise, how he could betray his Master? This accusation, Judas, no doubt, repelled, by impudently denying the fact; but consciousness of guilt, giving edge to the reproaches of his brethren, and to every circumstance of the affair, he thinking himself affronted, immediately left the company, exceedingly displeased.

Our blessed Saviour's sufferings were now at hand: the traitor Judas was gone to the chief priests and elders, for a band of soldiers to apprehend him; but this did not discompose the Redeemer of mankind; he took occasion to meditate on the glory that would accrue both to himself and to the Almighty, from those sufferings, and spake of it to his disciples: *Now*, said he, *is the Son of man Glorified, and God is glorified in him.* He also told them, that having already done honour to his Father, by the past actions of his life, and being about to honor him yet further by his sufferings and death, which would display his perfections, particularly his infinite love to the human race, in the most astonishing and amiable light, he was in his turn to receive honor from the Almighty; intimating that his human nature was to be exalted to the right hand of Omnipotence, and that his mission from God was to be supported by irrefragable attestation. But his disciples, imagining that he spake of the glory of a temporal kingdom, their ambition was again revived, and they began to dispute with as much keenness as ever, which of them should be the greatest in that kingdom. This contention, JESUS, composed by the

arguments he had formerly used for the same purpose. Amongst the Gentiles, said he, they are reckoned the greatest, who have the greatest power, and have exercised it in the most absolute manner: but your greatness shall be very different from theirs; it shall not consist in being unlimited with regard to tyrannical power, even though it should be joined with an affection of titles, which denote qualities truly honourable; but whosoever desires to be great, or chief among you, let him be so by his humility, and the service he renders to the rest, in imitation of me your Master, whose greatness consists in this, that I am become the servant of you: adding as they had continued with him in this temptation, he would bestow upon them such a kingdom as his Father had appointed for them. At the same time, to check their ambition, and lead them to form a just notion of his kingdom, he told them, that he was soon to leave them, and that whither he was going, they could not at that time follow him; for which reason, instead of contending with one another, which of them should be the greatest, they would do well to be united among themselves, in the happy bond of love: for, by loving one another sincerely and fervently, they would prove themselves his disciples, to the conviction of mankind, who could not be ignorant, that the distinguishing part of his character was love.

Our Lord called this a new commandment, not because mutual love had never been enjoined on mankind before, but because it was a precept of peculiar excellency: for the word *new* in the Hebrew language, denotes excellency and truth: and the reason of this idiom seems to have been, that novelty oftentimes has the same effect upon the mind as excellency, rendering an object acceptable, and raising admiration: he also called this a new commandment, because they were to exercise it under a new relation according to a new measure, and from new motives: they were to love one another in the relation of his disciples, and

in that degree of love which he had shewed to them; for they were to lay down their lives for the brethren. This excellent morality, however, did not make such an impression on Peter, as the words which JESUS had spoken concerning a place whither his disciples could not come: he therefore replied, by asking where he was going? To which JESUS answered, *Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.*

In order to make his disciples humble, watchful, and kindly-affectionate one towards another, he assured them, that Satan was seeking to ruin them all by his temptations: *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.* Peter was greatly offended that his Master should have singled him out as the weakest; for so he interpreted his praying for him particularly: and supposing that he mentioned Satan's seeking to sift him, as a thing which would hinder him from following his Master, replied, Why cannot I follow thee now? Is there any road more terrible than the dark valley of the shadow of death? Yet, I am willing this moment to accompany thee through these black and gloomy shades.

But JESUS knowing his weak, though sincere resolution, answered, art thou so very confident of thine own strength? *I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.* Luke xxii. 34.

Our dear Lord having finished what he had to say to Peter in particular, turned himself to his other disciples, and put them in mind, how that, when they were first sent out, he directed them to rely wholly upon the Almighty for assistance. 'When I sent you formerly,' said he, 'to preach the gospel, you may remember, I

ordered you to go without provision either for your sustenance or defence, assuring you, that though you would indeed meet with great opposition, yet Providence would dispose some men in all places to be your friends, and to furnish you with all necessaries; and accordingly, you found that you wanted for nothing, but were wonderfully supported without any care or provision of your own in the whole journey, and finished your work with success. But now the case is very different; the time of that greatest trial and distress, whereof I have often forewarned you, is just at hand; and you may now make all the provision in your power, and arm yourselves against it as much as you are able: the time, I say, of the greatest trial and distress that ever yet befel you, is now at hand; for I am just going to be betrayed into the hands of my inveterate enemies. I have finished the work for which I was sent into the world; and nothing now remains for me, but to undergo those sufferings which the prophets have foretold concerning me, and, by submitting at last to a most cruel and ignominious death, to complete this whole dispensation of Providence. The disciples thinking that their great Master meant, that they should arm themselves in a literal sense, and endeavour to oppose the assaults that would shortly be made upon them by the Jews, answered, *Lord here are two swords:* but the blessed JESUS, who only intended to convey an idea of their approaching distress and temptations, and to arm them against the surprise, replied, *It is enough.*

Our blessed Saviour having thus forewarned his disciples of the great trial that was coming upon them, and commanded them to arm themselves against it, proceeded to animate them to sustain the trial manfully, and to comfort them under the dismal apprehensions it might cause in their minds. Be not terrified and disconsolate, said the compassionate Redeemer of mankind, because I have told you that I must undergo great sufferings, and be taken away from you for a time.

You have always been taught to believe in God, who is the Almighty Preserver and Governor of all things; and to rely on him for deliverance in every affliction and distress. Learn now, in like manner, to believe in me, who have all power committed to me, as preserver and head of my church; and trust in me to accomplish fully all things that I have promised you if you do this, and persist stedfastly in the belief of my doctrine, and in the obedience of my commands, nothing in this vale of misery, not even persecution, or death itself, shall be able to hinder you from attaining the happiness I have promised to you: for in heaven, my Father's house, there is abundant room to receive you, otherwise I would not have filled your minds with the hopes and expectations of happiness: but, as there are mansions sufficient for you in another state, you may with confidence and assurance, hope for the full accomplishment of my promises, notwithstanding all this present world may contrive to act against you. And ye ought also to bear patiently my departure from you at this time; since I only leave you to open the portals of those eternal habitations, where I shall be ever with you, and to prepare a place for your reception: after which I will return and take you to myself. Nor shall you evermore be separated from me, but continue with me to all eternity, in full participation of my eternal glory and happiness, in the blissful regions of the heavenly Canaan. You must now surely know the way that leads to these happy seats of immortality, and whither I am going.

However, the disciples, whose minds were not yet fully weaned from the expectations of temporal power and glory, did not understand this discourse of their great and beloved Master. Accordingly, Thomas, replied, *Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?* To which the blessed JESUS answered, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life.* Imitating my example, and obeying my commands, is the way to arrive at the place whither I am going; name-

ly, to my Father's house, and to the enjoyment of his eternal happiness; nor can any man go thither by any other way. If ye say ye do not know the Father, I tell you that no man who knoweth me, can be ignorant of my Father, of his will, and of the manner of pleasing him; for my Father and I are one: so that if ye know me, ye must know the Father also; and indeed ye do know him, and have been sufficiently instructed in his precepts. Then Philip answered, Lord, shew us but once the Father, and we shall be fully satisfied. But JESUS replied, have I been so long continually with you, and dost thou not yet know me, Philip? I tell you, I and my Father are the same; so that to know one, is to be acquainted with both. What then, can you mean, by desiring to see the Father, as if you could still be ignorant of him after being so long acquainted with me? Do you not believe that the Father and I are one and the same? Whatsoever I speak, is the declaration of his will, and whatsoever I do, is the operation of his power. Believe me, that the Father and I are one; and if ye refuse to believe my own affirmation, yet as my works carry in them undeniable evidences of a divine power, let them convince you.

You then surely have matter sufficient to comfort and support your spirits under the thoughts of my departure from you. Ye have abundant reason to believe, that I have power to perform all the promises I have made you, and the design of my departure is actually to perform them. When I am returned to my Father, ye shall soon receive sufficient pledges of my care and remembrance of you: ye shall be endued with power not only to perform the same works ye have seen me do, as healing diseases, giving sight to the blind, casting out devils, and the like, for the conviction of the Jews, but even to do greater things than those; to speak with all kinds of tongues, and to propagate my religion through all the nations of the earth, even amongst the Gentiles.

As being my disciples, and in order to promote the work of the gospel, whatsoever ye shall ask of my Father in my name, shall certainly be granted you: that God may be greatly glorified, by the extraordinary success and spreading the religion of his Son, I say, that whatsoever ye shall ask, I will take care, that after my return to the Father, it shall be granted you; only ye must remember, as the necessary condition upon which all depends, that ye be careful above all things, to continue steadfast and immoveable in your obedience to my commands: this is the only true mark ye can give of the sincerity of your love towards me; it is more than your grieving at my departure.

I say, the Father shall send you another advocate and comforter, even his Holy Spirit, the author and teacher of truth, who shall guide and direct, assist and comfort you in all cases. This Spirit, the sensual and corrupt world cannot receive, having no knowledge of him, nor disposition to be governed by him; but ye know him, and are disposed to entertain him: he is already in you, by his secret and invisible efficacy; and shall hereafter appear in you openly, by great and visible manifestations of himself. Thus, though I must depart from you, yet I do by no means leave you comfortless: I leave with you a promise of the Holy Spirit, and I leave you in expectation also of my own return: for though, after a very little while, I shall appear no more to the world; yet, as I shall live again, and ye also shall live with me, to you I will appear.

Therefore, when I have conquered and triumphed over death, ye shall understand more fully, and it shall appear more visible by great and manifest effects, that I act, in all things, agreeable to my Father's will, and am perfectly invested with his power; and that ye in like manner, have my power and commission communicated to you: so that there is a perfect unity and community between us; only ye must remember, that the one necessary condition, on which all depends, is, that ye con-

tinue steadfast and immoveable in your faith in me, and in your obedience to my commands. He, and he only, who embraces my doctrine, and obeys and practises it, shall be judged to be sincere in his love towards me: *And he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*

Judas Thaddeus here interrupted his Master, saying, *Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?*

To which JESUS replied, I have already told you the reason of my acting in this manner; because the generality of the world are not disposed to obey my commandments, the necessary condition of maintaining communion with me: but ye are disposed to embrace my doctrine, and to obey it; and, therefore, I manifest myself to you. And whoever else will so love me as to keep my commandments, him also will I and my Father love, and will maintain communion with him, and all spiritual blessings shall be poured down upon him, and he shall be made partaker of happiness and eternal life. On the contrary, whoever loves me not, that is, obeys not my commandments, shall have no intercourse or communion with me; neither will my Father love or honor him, or make any manifestations of himself to him: for as my commandments are not my own, but the Father's commandments, therefore, whoever dishonours me, my Father will look upon him as dishonouring himself.

I have briefly spoken these things unto you now, according to the shortness of the time I am to continue with you, and to comfort you for the present, against my departure. But when the comforter, whom I promised you is come, even the Holy Spirit, whom my Father shall send you on my account, shall instruct you more fully, recalling to your remembrance what you have forgotten, explaining what is yet obscure, and

supplying what is further necessary to be taught you, and to be understood by you. In the mean time I take my leave of you, and my blessing I leave with you; not formally, and after the common fashion of the world, but affectionately and sincerely, retaining a careful remembrance of you, and with an earnest desire and intention of returning again speedily to you. Wherefore, be not overmuch grieved for me and my departure, nor fearful of what may then befal yourselves: I go away from you, but it is with an intention, as I have already told you, to return to you again. If you loved me with a wise and understanding affection, you would rejoice instead of grieving at my present departure; because I am going to the Supreme Author of all glory and happiness, even to my Father.

I have now told you these things before they come to pass, that when ye see them happen, your faith in me, and your expectation of the performance of all my promises may be confirmed and strengthened; the time will not allow me to say much more to you at present; my end draweth near; the ruler of this world, the prince of the power of darknesss, is at this instant employing all his wicked instruments to apprehend and destroy me: not that either the power of the Devil, or the malice of man, can at all prevail over me, but because the time of my suffering, according to the appointment of Divine Wisdom, is arrived; and that I may demonstrate to the world my love and obedience to my Father, I willingly submit myself to be put to death by the hands of sinful and cruel men, Rise up, let us be going, that I may enter on my sufferings. See John, chap. xiv. ver. 1, to the end.

Thus having spoken, they finished the passover with singing a hymn, and went out to the Mount of Olives. The hymn which they sung was probably that which the Jews call the *Hallem*, or great hymn, which consisted of the hundred and thirteenth and five subsequent Psalms; part of which was sung at the beginning of the solemnity, and part at the end.

When they arrived at the place which was to be the scene of his sufferings, he desired them to fortify themselves by prayer, and forewarned them of the terrible effects his sufferings would have upon them; they would make them all stumble that very night, agreeable to the prophecy of Zechariah: *I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.* Therefore, he not only mentioned his own resurrection, but told them they should see him in Galilee, after he was risen from the dead, in order to strengthen their faith.

Peter, on our blessed Saviour's mentioning the offence that his disciples would take at his sufferings, recollected what had been said to him in particular, before they left the house. Grieving therefore afresh, to find his Master entertain such thoughts of him, and being now armed with a sword, the vehemence of his temper urged him to boast a second time of his courageous and close attachment to his Master, *Though all men*, said he, *should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.* But JESUS, knowing that confidence and security are great enemies to virtue, thought proper to forewarn him against his danger and told him, that the cock should not crow before he had denied him. Peter still however continued to repeat his confidence, I will die with thee, but never deny thee. The disciples all joined with Peter in professing their fixed resolution of suffering death, rather than they would deny their Master; but the event fully confirmed the predictions of our Saviour. From whence we may learn, how ignorant men are of themselves.

Our dear Lord, not willing to loose one single moment of the short time of his ministry that yet remained, continued to instruct his disciples in the great truths he came into the world to explain: and from the vines, which were growing round him on the Mount of Olives, he began his excellent discourse, with the parable of the vine, which we shall endeavour to explain in the following manner.

Hitherto, said the compassionate Redeemer of mankind, the Jewish church and nation have been the particular care of Providence; as a choice and a goodly vine, likely to bring forth much fruit, is the especial care of the husbandmen: but from henceforth, my church, my disciples, and the professors of my religion, of whatsoever country or nation they be, shall become the people of God, and the peculiar care of Divine Providence: I will be to them as the root and stock of a vine, of which my Father is the husbandman and vine-dresser, and they are the branches.

As the skilful vine-dresser, in the management of a choice vine, cuts off all barren and superfluous branches, that they may not burden nor exhaust the tree, and prunes and dresses the fruitful branches, that they may grow continually, and bear more fruit: so in the government of my church, all useless, wicked, and incorrigible members, my Father, by his just judgment cuts off and destroys; but those who are sincerely pious and good, he, by the various and merciful dispensation of his providence towards them, tries, purifies, and amends, that they may daily improve, and be more abundant in all good works. Now ye, my apostles, are such members as these, being purified in heart and mind, and prepared for every good work, by your lively faith in me, and sincere resolutions to obey my commands. Continue stedfastly in this state, and then you may be sure of deriving all spiritual blessings from me, as the branches receive sap and nourishment from the vine: but as a branch, without continuing in the vine, cannot bear any fruit, but presently dries up and perishes; so ye, unless ye continue stedfast in your communion with me, by a lively faith and sincere obedience, so as to receive grace and spiritual blessings, can never bring forth any good fruit of true holiness and righteousness, but will fall into vanity, superstition and wickedness, and will utterly perish at last. I say, I am, as it were, the root and stock of the vine, whereof ye are the branches: he that continues to adhere to

me, by constant faith in me, by imitating my example, and by obeying my commands, shall bring forth much fruit, of true virtue and holiness, unto everlasting life; even as a branch which continues to grow in a vine, and receives sap and nourishment from it: but he that does not continue his relation to me in this manner, is a false and useless professor of my religion, and shall be cast out from me, and perish for ever: even as a fruitless branch is cut off from the vine, and left to whither and dry, and is at last burnt in the fire: but if ye continue in me, by believing my words, and holding fast what ye believe, and obeying and practising it, no power, or malice, either of men or of devils, shall be able to hurt you, or oppose your doctrines: for though I be absent from you in the body, yet I will hear your prayers, and my Father himself also will hear you; and whatsoever ye shall ask, for the glory of the Almighty, and the propagation of my true religion in the world, shall certainly be granted you: but, above all things, carefully remember to demonstrate your continuance in me, by abounding in all the good works of holiness, righteousness, and charity. This is the honour which my Father desires and expects from you, even as it is the glory and desire of a vine-dresser, that his vine should bring forth much fruit; and this is the honour that I myself expect from you, that ye should prove yourselves to be really and indeed my disciples, by imitating my example, and obeying my commands: this ye are bound to do, not only in duty, but in gratitude also; for as my Father hath loved me, so have I also loved you, and ye in like manner ought to love me again, that you may continue to be loved by me: but the way to express your love towards me, and to continue to be loved by me, is to keep my commandments; even as I, by keeping my Fathers commandments, have expressed my love towards him, and continue to be loved by him.

I have spoken to you these things before my departure, that the comfort ye have taken in my pre-

sence, may be continued in my absence, and even increased at the coming of the Holy Spirit, as it will be upon this condition, which I have so often repeated to you, that you keep my commandments: and the principal of these commandments is, that ye love one another, not after the common fashion of the world, but in such a manner as I have loved you; nor can you be ignorant what sort of love that is, when I tell you that I am now going to lay down my life for you: this is the highest instance, in which it is possible for man to express his love towards his greatest friends and benefactors; and this I am now going to do for you and for all mankind: I do not consider you as my benefactors, but as my friends, upon this easy condition only, that ye keep my commandments. I might, indeed, justly call you servants, considering the infinite distance between me and you, and the obligation ye have to obey my commandments: but I have not treated you as servants, who are not admitted into their master's councils, but as friends, revealing to you with all freedom and plainness, the whole will of my Father.

I say, I have behaved myself to you, as to the nearest friends; not that you first obliged me, or did any acts of kindness for me, but I have freely, and of my own good pleasure, chosen you to be my apostles, and the preachers of my gospel, that you may go and declare the will of God to the world, and bring forth much and lasting fruit, in the conversion of men to the knowledge of the truth, and to the profession and practice of true religion and virtue. In the performance of this work, whatsoever ye shall ask of my Father in my name, it shall certainly be granted you, in order to enable you to perform it effectually, and with full success.

In all these things which I have spoken unto you, concerning the greatness of my love towards you, in choosing you to be my apostles, in revealing unto you the whole will of my Father, and in laying down my

life for you; I have urged and inculcated upon you this reason chiefly, as I at first told you, that ye may learn, after my example to *love one another*. The world, indeed, you must expect, will hate and persecute you upon my account; but this you ought not be surprised or terrified at, knowing that I myself have met with the same treatment before you.

But the reason why the generality of the world have opposed and persecuted me, is because my doctrine is inconsistent with their lusts and passions, their covetousness and unjust ambition; and, for the same reason, there is no doubt but they will oppose and persecute you also. If ye were of the spirit of the world, flattering men in their sins, and teaching doctrines consistent with their lusts and passions, the world, doubtless, would love and honour you; but since I have chosen you out of the world, to reprove its vices, and to preach the necessity of reformation, and of men amending their lives, if the world hate and persecute you, wonder not.

Therefore, be not surprised, when ye meet with opposition; nor think to find better treatment in the world than I myself have done. Remember what I have already told you, that the disciple is not above his Master, nor is he that is sent, greater than he that sent him. If men had generally and readily embraced my doctrine, you might, indeed have had some reason to expect, that they would willingly have received yours also: but since I myself have suffered great indignities and persecutions from wicked and perverse, from obstinate and incorrigible men, only for opposing their vices, it is highly reasonable that you should expect to undergo the like treatment upon the like account: in all which sufferings you will moreover have this comfortable consideration to support you, that the justice of your own cause, and the injustice of your persecutors, will by that very means most evidently appear: seeing ye are persecuted only for professing and preach-

ing in my name, the doctrine of true religion and virtue; and they persecute you only, because they know not God, and out of mere malice will not bear to be instructed in his command. Indeed, had not I appeared to the world with all possible demonstrations of authority and truth, teaching men, a most holy and undeniable doctrine, sufficient to reform their manners and amend their lives, and moreover demonstrating my divine commission, by such proofs as ought to satisfy and convince the most doubting and suspicious minds; they might have had some plea and excuse of ignorance for their unbelief; but now, since all reasonable evidence has been offered them, and proper methods used for their conversion and salvation, and yet they wilfully and obstinately reject these means of grace, it is plain they have no excuse for their sin; but they oppose and persecute you only because they will not forsake their worldly lusts, and out of mere malice will not bear to be instructed in the commands of the Almighty: so that they who oppose and persecute you, as they have before persecuted me, shew plainly that they are haters of God, and of his most holy commandments; which is, as I have already told you, a plain evidence of the injustice of your persecutors, and of the justice of your own case.

I say, if I had not done such works amongst them as no man ever did, they might, indeed have had some appearance of excuse for their sin: but now, having seen abundant proofs of my authority, and undeniable evidence of the truth of my doctrine, and yet wilfully and obstinately persisting to oppose it, because inconsistent with their lusts; it is plain that their dishonouring me, is a dishonour done to God himself, and a direct contempt of his commands; so that they are utterly inexcusable. But it is no wonder, when men have given themselves wholly up to be governed by worldly affections, passions, and vices, they should act contrary to all the reason and evidence in the world: for this is but the natural consequence of obstinate and habitual

wickedness; and hereby is only fulfilled in me, what holy David long since prophetically complained of, that they hated him without a cause.

However, notwithstanding all the opposition that wicked and incorrigible men will make against my doctrine, there will not be wanting powerful promoters of it, who shall effectually overcome all opposition; for the comforter, whom I said I will send you from heaven, even that *spirit of truth*, which cometh forth, and is sent from the Father, shall, when he cometh, with wonderful efficacy bear testimony to the truth of my doctrine, and cause it to spread through the world with incredible success; nay, and ye yourselves also, though now so weak, fearful, and doubting, shall then very powerfully bear testimony to the truth of all the things whereof ye have been eye-witnesses from the beginning, having been all along present with me.

I have thus warned you beforehand, of the opposition and persecution ye must expect to meet with in the world, that when it cometh ye may not be surprised and terrified so as to be discouraged thereby from persisting in the performance of your duty. You must expect particularly, that the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, men of great hypocrisy and superstition, zealous for their ceremonies and ritual traditions, but careless to know and obey the will of Omnipotence, in matters of great and eternal obligation, and invincibly prejudiced against the spiritual holiness and purity of my doctrine: these, I say, you must expect will excommunicate you as apostates, and cast you out of all their societies, as the vilest of malefactors; nay, to such an absurd height of malice will their superstition carry them, that they will even fancy they promote the service of God, and the cause of religion, when they most barbarously murder and destroy you: but I have warned you of all this beforehand, that ye may prepare and fortify yourselves against it, that ye may remember I foretold it to you, and that your faith in me may thereby be strengthened, when it cometh to pass.

Indeed, I did not tell you particularly of these things at the beginning, when you first followed me and became my disciples, because then I was to continue with you in person, and support you in all things by my immediate presence: but now, being about to leave you, I think it necessary to acquaint you what things are likely to come upon you after my departure, and also what comfort you may expect to support you under them, at the same time.

I must now mention the melancholy part, namely, that I am going from you, and that great temptations will befal you in my absence; this, indeed, ye readily apprehend, and suffer your hearts to be overwhelmed with grief at the thoughts of it: but the comfortable part of my discourse, namely, that my departure is only in order to return to him that sent me, and that I will soon after send you the Holy Spirit, and the other advantages that will thence result to you, are neither considered, nor are you solictious about them. Nevertheless, if ye will listen, I will plainly tell you the truth: ye are so far from having reason to be dejected at the thoughts of my departure, that on the contrary it is really profitable and expedient for you, that I should now depart; for such is the order and dispensation of Providence towards you, and the appointment of my Father's eternal and all-wise council, that before I go and take possession of my kingdom, the comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, cannot be sent unto you; but when I am departed from you, and have all power in heaven and earth committed unto me, then I will send him unto you: and when he cometh he shall abundantly support and comfort you under all your troubles; shall powerfully plead your cause against your adversaries; and shall, with wonderful efficacy, cause the doctrine of the gospel to spread and prevail in the world against all opposition: he shall particularly, and in a most extraordinary and convincing manner, make the world sensible of the greatness and heinousness of a sin of which they

were not aware; of the righteousness and justice of a dispensation they did not understand, and of the execution of a most remarkable judgment they did not expect. First, by wonderfully attesting and confirming the truth of my doctrine, by the gift of tongues, and other wonderful signs, he shall convince the world of the greatness and heinousness of their sins, in disbelieving and rejecting me. Secondly, by demonstrating, that my departure out of the world, was not perishing and dying, but only a returning to my Father, in order to be invested with all power both in heaven and earth, he shall convince the world of the righteousness and justice of my cause, and of the excellency of that dispensation which I preached and declared to mankind. Lastly, he shall convince men of my power and authority to execute judgment upon mine enemies, for establishment of my kingdom upon earth, by mightily destroying the power of the Devil, and the dominion of sin, and propagating the doctrine of true religion in the world, with wonderful efficacy and success.

Many other things are yet hereafter to be done in relation to the settling and establishing of my church, which, if it were proper, I would now acquaint you with, but ye are not yet prepared to understand and receive them. Howbeit, when the Spirit of Truth, whom I promised you, is come, he shall enlarge your understandings, remove your prejudices, and instruct you in all necessary and divine truths, to enable you to go through that great work, which I have begun in person, and which I will carry on by your ministry; for the Spirit is not to begin any new work, or to found any new doctrine of himself: but as I have taught, and will teach you only in my Father's name, so the Spirit shall instruct you only in mine and my Father's will, and in things necessary to promote and carry on the same design. Every thing that he does shall be only in order to manifest my glory, and establish my religion in the world; even as every thing

that I have done, has been only to manifest my Father's glory, and reveal his will to mankind: for as all that I have taught is only what I received from my Father, so all that the Spirit shall teach you, is only what he receives from me. Whatsoever, I say, the Spirit shall teach you, is only what he receives from me; for receiving from my Father, I call receiving from me, and teaching his will, is teaching mine; seeing all things that the Father hath, are common to me, and all power and dominion is committed to me by him.

Be careful now to remember what matter for comfort I have given you, and support yourselves with it, under the approaching distress. It is now, indeed, but a very little while before I shall be taken away from you; nevertheless, let not this cause you to despair: for, after I am departed, it will be also but a little while before I appear to you again; inasmuch as my being taken away from you, is not perishing, but only returning to my Father. At these last words of JESUS, the disciples were greatly disturbed and troubled, not understanding his true meaning, that in a very short time he should be taken from them by death; and that, after having overcome death by a glorious resurrection, he would appear to them again before his ascension into heaven. Not understanding this, they inquired, one of another, what can he mean by telling us, that in a very little time he shall be taken out of our sight: and that in a very little time more, we shall see him again, and this because he goeth to the Father? The meaning of all this we cannot understand.

But JESUS observing their perplexity, and knowing that they were desirous of asking him, replied, Why are ye thus disturbed and perplexed about what I told you? Is it a thing so very hard to be understood, that I said, within a very little time I should be taken away from you, and that within a very little time more, I should

appear to you again? Verily, verily, I tell you, I must soon depart out of this world: and when the world, who are your enemies, will rejoice and triumph over you, as if they had destroyed me, and wholly suppressed you: ye for your parts will be overwhelmed with grief and sorrow; but, within a short time, I will return to you again, and then your sorrow shall be turned into exceeding great joy; even as a woman when she is in labour, hath great pain and sorrow for the present, but, as soon as she is delivered forgets all her sufferings, and rejoices greatly at the birth of her son; so ye, while ye are under the immediate apprehension of my departure from you, and during that time of distress and temptation which shall befal you in my absence, will be full of sorrow and anxiety of mind; but when I return to you again, then ye shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and the cause of continuance of it, no power or malice of man shall ever be able to take from you any more.

However, though I shall return to you again, and your hearts will thereupon be filled with inexpressible joy, and which never shall be taken from you any more; yet there will be no necessity that I should then continue long with you in person, to instruct you upon every occasion, as I have now done with my own mouth: for besides that the Holy Spirit will be sent to instruct you in all things necessary, my Father himself also will hear your petitions and be ready to grant you whatsoever you shall desire of him in my name, as being my disciples. Hitherto ye have asked nothing of God in my name; but from henceforth put up your petitions in my name, and whatsoever ye shall so ask for the glory of God, and in order to enable you to go through the work of your ministry successfully, shall certainly be granted you; that your joy, which will begin at my appearing to you again after my death, may be completed by the wonderful success and efficacy of your own ministry. These things I have told you, at present, imperfect and ob-

securely, according as your capacities are able to bear them; but the time is coming, when your prejudices being removed, I will speak to you with more openness, freedom, and plainness the whole will of my Father, concerning the nature and establishment of my kingdom, and what things ye ought to pray unto him for, and in what manner.

Ye shall at that time, with firm assurance pray to my Father in my name, for what ye want: and I need not tell you, that I will intercede with the Father on your behalf: for besides the love he has for me, and the power and authority my prayers have with him, he has moreover, of himself, a great love for you, and a ready disposition to grant your prayers, because ye are become grateful and acceptable to him, by your love towards me, which ye have shewn, in embracing willingly that holy doctrine which I have revealed to you from him.

Now to conclude: the sum of what I have told you, is briefly and plainly this: I came down from heaven from God my Father, and have lived upon earth in the state of frail and mortal man, that I might reveal to mankind the will of my heavenly Father, and the way to attain eternal life and happiness: and now having finished this great work, I am about to leave this world, and return again to my Father from whence I at first came. These last words of JESUS, being somewhat more plain and express, than any he had before spoken, so that now the disciples clearly perceived that the departure he had so often mentioned, was no other than his actual going out of this world, they replied, Now, Lord thou speakest plainly, and without any figure; so that we apprehend fully what thou meanest; And now that our curiosity is satisfied, thou hast likewise greatly confirmed our faith; having given us a certain token, whereby we are assured that thou knowest all things, even the hearts and secret thoughts of men, since thou hast answered

us a question which gave us great perplexity, and were desirous to ask thy opinion of, but were afraid: but now we are convinced, that thou art endued with a truly divine power and did indeed come from God. To which JESUS answered, and do you now at length firmly believe in me? Are you resolved to continue stedfast in this faith? Do you think yourselves able to persevere immovably in the possession of it? Be not confident of your own strength but pray that ye may be delivered from temptation in time of distress, such as will come upon you much sooner than ye expect: for I tell you, that ye will all of you within a few hours utterly forsake me, and fly, in hopes to secure yourselves, leaving me alone; and yet I should not stay alone since my Father is with me, who is more than all: I have therefore acquainted you with these things beforehand, that your minds may be furnished with sufficient matter of comfort and strength to bear up under all temptations, from the consideration of my having foretold both what distresses will befal you and how ye shall terminate your victory over all your enemies! *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* John xvi. 33.

Thus having finished his discourse, JESUS lifted up his eyes to heaven, and prayed, saying, O Almighty Father! now the time of my sufferings, for which I was sent into the world, is arrived; I entreat thee support me under it, and make me triumph over death, by a glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven; that by this means the glory may redound to thee, and cause thy will to be believed and obeyed through all the world, to the salvation of mankind; according to the full intent of that office and power with which thou didst originally invest me to receive all fitly disposed persons into the covenant of salvation, and to assist and preserve them in it unto everlasting happiness: the condition of this covenant is, that they firm-

ly believe and obey thee, as the only true God, and JESUS CHRIST, as the true Messiah, whom thou hast sent. In order to the bringing about this great design of salvation, I have declared thy will to mankind; I have published thy precepts, and discharged the great mission entrusted to me; I have preached the doctrine of repentance to salvation, and have finished the work which thou sentest me to do, to the glory of thy name upon earth; and now to complete the great design, do thou O Almighty Father! likewise glorify me with thine own self; support me under my sufferings; let me prevail and triumph over death, by a glorious resurrection, and exalt me again to the same glory in heaven which I had with thee before the creation of the universe. I have manifested thy will to my disciples, the men that thou gavest me out of the world, and to all such as were fitted and disposed to receive it; to such as by a pious habit, and teachable disposition, were prepared to embrace whatever doctrine should appear to come from thee. To those persons thou didst in thine infinite wisdom appoint, that thy truth should be made known, and not to the prejudiced and vicious world; therefore, to them I have revealed the mysteries of thy kingdom, the precepts of thy gospel, and the doctrine of thy salvation; and this doctrine they have willingly embraced, stedfastly adhered to, and sincerely obeyed; as they are fully satisfied and convinced, that what I taught them as from thee, was really a divine doctrine taught by thine immediate appointment and command; and that I did not preach any human invention or institution of men, but was really sent by thy divine authority and commission. For these persons, therefore I now pray, that as thou hast begun the work of their salvation by my preaching and revealing to them thy will, while I have been present with them here upon earth; so also that thou wouldest preserve them when I am departed from this world, and complete the work of their salvation by my resurrection and ascension into heaven after my death. I do not pray for the unbelieving impenitent

world, but for those who have embraced that most holy doctrine, which thou hast taught them through me by my preaching; for those who have glorified and will glorify my name by their ministry, and who consequently are to be esteemed as thine own, in common with me. I am now about to leave the world, in order to return to thee, but these my disciples, who continue after me I recommend to thy divine protection, when I am gone; endue them with powers to persevere in preaching and practising the truth, and to deliver the same holy doctrines which I have given to them, that so they may remain inseparably united to me, as I am to thee: so long as I have been with them, in the world, I have watched over them, and kept them from falling away, both by example, preaching, and continual admonition, according to the power and authority which thou didst commit to me; nor has one of my apostles miscarried under my care, except that perfidious traitor who, as the Scripture foretold, has ungratefully conspired with my enemies to destroy me, and will perish according to his deserts. While I have continued with my disciples, I have watched over them and preserved them under mine own eye: but now, as I am going to leave the world I beseech thee to keep and assist them by thy good Spirit; and let the expectation of their continuing under thy special care and protection, be their comfort and support in my absence. The world, indeed, will persecute and hate them on this account, as my doctrine is repugnant to the lusts and affections, the passions, designs, and inclinations of worldly men; it must necessarily be, that the vicious and incorrigible world will oppose and persecute them, as it has before persecuted me; I beseech thee, therefore, to take them under thy particular care, to support them against the violence and oppression of an evil world: I do not desire that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but preserve them in it to be instruments of thy word, thy glory, and to be teachers of thy truth; nor suffer them to be either destroyed by the

malice and violence of a perverse and wicked generation, or corrupted by the evil customs and opinions of it.

According to the example of purity which I have set before them, they are of a temper and spirit very different from the current affections and common dispositions of the world. Do thou preserve and increase in them that moderation and candour of mind; cause them to be thoroughly affected and impressed with that true doctrine so frequently recommended to them from my mouth, so as to express it visibly in their lives and practice, and to promote it zealously in their preaching, that they may become worthy and successful ministers of my gospel, both by word and good example.

As thou hast sent me into the world to reveal thy will to mankind, so send I these my apostles to continue preaching the same doctrine begun by me; and the principal design of my exemplary life, constant teaching, and now voluntarily offering myself to death for it, is to sanctify and enable them to preach with success and efficacy for the salvation of men. Neither pray I for these my apostles only, but for all others, who shall, by their preaching and practice, promote thy true religion; and being converted from the world, may, by their sincere endeavours, go on to reform others, convincing the world of the excellency of their religion, and consequently enforcing men to acknowledge the truth and divine authority thereof: for promoting which great end, I have communicated to my apostles the same power and authority of doing mighty works for the confirmation of their doctrine, and the evidence of thy truth, as thou didst communicate to me; that so I working in them as thou hast done in me, and thus confirming with great efficacy and demonstration of Spirit, they may establish the same doctrine which I published in person, that the world may, by this evidence, be convinced that I was

really sent by thee, and that my disciples act by the same divine commission as I did.

Almighty and Holy Father, all those whom thou hast thus given me, who have wisely embraced my doctrine, and sincerely obeyed it, I desire that thou wouldest make partakers of the same happiness with myself, and exalt them to behold the incomprehensible glory wherewith thou didst originally invest me in thy eternal love, before the foundation of the world. The generality of mortals, O righteous Father! the covetous and ambitious, the crafty and designing men of this world have not known thee, nor been willing to embrace and obey the revelation of thy will, and have made it known to my disciples, men of simplicity and honesty; and they have embraced and obeyed it: and I will continually make it known to them more and more, that they may grow up and improve in faith, in holiness, and in all good works, so as finally to arrive, and cause others to arrive, at that eternal happiness, which is the effect of thy infinite love and mercy towards me and them.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.